

PHILOSOPHICAL BLINDNESS AND THE BLACK SUBJECT:
THE DECONSTRUCTION OF A DISCIPLINE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation is focused on the creation and analysis of the content of the Black American Philosophical and Education Project. Of particular interest to me is the historical pursuit and experience of the study of Philosophy in the American higher education system by Black American students. This study is located at the cross-section of Philosophy, African American Studies, and Education, and it moves between the ideology of philosophical disciplinarily and the actual historical narrative on and about Black practitioners of Philosophy. It is my most earnest attempt to keep the intellectual unity of both enterprises. In my view, much of the discourse on the profession of Philosophy and its social implications is too abstract, absent one locating it in a historical context. I analyze this relationship through the use of key primary documents including autobiographies of Black American students as well as oral interviews from Black Philosophers themselves.

This work is dedicated to

The Sunnyside Housing Projects

Webster Cantrell Hall

Western Avenue Community Center

Osceola, Arkansas

Terri Jackson

Patty Alsieder

Deacon Green

Susan Dickey

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The greatest gospel singer of them all Mahalia Jackson sings the song “Give me my flowers while I yet live,” the refrain from this song is one of my favorites. If I close my eyes sometimes I can still hear the song being sung by the senior choir at Loving Missionary Baptist Church. It is with this I would like to thank a few people. This dissertation is possible only through the support of many people, more than I can list in such an infinitesimal space. The following, however, represents my best attempt to acknowledge some of those people who have made not just this work possible, but have made sizable contributions to my intellectual, spiritual, and personal development.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Epistemological and Autobiographical Introduction

I remember watching television one day, and if my memory serves me correctly, I was perhaps fourteen or fifteen. I found this brother on television rather striking; he had a large Afro and he wore non-descript black glasses. He sported a pinstriped black suit tailor-made to his wiry frame. In today's urban vernacular, one would say he was rather fancy. As he appeared to me to be a man of considerable means, certainly means much greater than my family, as we were residents of a small town public housing project, I vividly remember being struck by the manner in which this brother spoke to the White interviewer.

He used words that I had never heard before. The command of the English language he displayed was then awe-inspiring for a young Black man like me, with the possible exception of Brother Gary Muhammad and the other members of the Nation of Islam. I had never witnessed a White person to be so differential when interrogating a Black Person . But his deference was different. It was not the mixture of fear and contempt that Whites appeared to display to so-called "Black militants" or "racial dissidents," which to be candid, were the folks I was always drawn to as a youngster. This man was so different; he used his words like a precisely honed blade.

The brother spoke about coming-of-age during the tumult of the 1960's. He spoke of knowing, even then, that American society did not live up to its espoused beliefs. I was transfixed to the television screen. I was awestruck by the way Cornel West spoke, the way he paused to take deliberate breaths before answering the questions put before him. I could tell this man possessed a type of intellectual acumen that, even then, I perceived as being much worldlier

and more refined than simply being “street smart.” He was thinking deeply about how to bequeath his knowledge in a way that would be intelligible to both the questioner and the viewing audience. The phenomenon was not because the interviewer asked extremely difficult questions; in fact, it appeared to me he was carrying the conversation for both parties.

I pondered this for a while as I watched the man make the trivial become far more profound than the interviewer could have imagined it to ever have been. The interviewer said that this man was a philosopher, and that he possessed a PhD.¹ I did not understand what that degree entailed, but from that day I knew I wanted to be a philosopher and I wanted a PhD. My mom always made sure that my siblings and I always went to church and, in hindsight; it is fairly obvious now that the experience that has made me what Lewis Gordon terms a “Philosophical Oriented Individual”² that was created in the Black Church, more specifically in the prophetic Black Baptist tradition. Dr. Frank Suggs was a member of my church and a brilliant Music Professor at Illinois State University. He was the creator of an annual program to teach the community about the Civil Rights Movement, a series of short plays and skits entitled “Birmingham.”³ Dr. Suggs was truly an awesome man. Though he would probably shirk the designation, he was in my mind a so-called race man. Dr. Suggs was adamantly committed to the social, political, and cultural uplift of Black Americans. He instilled in me, through his example, a criticality that I still try to heed to this day. He taught me that our faith and commitment to church and God was simultaneously a blessing and a curse. Dr. Suggs suggested that the Black

1. Mills, C. Wright, and Louis Horowitz. "Graduate School and Professionalization." In *Sociology and pragmatism: the higher learning in America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964. This text, which is a modified version of Mills' PhD dissertation, takes as the focal point of its analysis the professionalization of philosophic education in the United States though it may rightly be argued that what Mills is primarily interested in is the genealogical roots of the pragmatist school of philosophical thought. In chapter 3, "Graduate School and Professionalization" of this still widely under read text, Mills demonstrates the extent to which American universities carried on little graduate study and research until after the Civil War. In fact, generally speaking most master's and PhD degrees until the early 1900s were largely a result of those who were able to pay for them.

2. Yancy, George. "Lewis Gordon." In *African-American Philosophers: 17 conversations*. New York: Routledge Press, 1998. 95-119

3. Suggs, Frank. Birmingham. <http://my.ilstu.edu/~fsuggs/html/birmingham.html>. (Accessed April 17, 2014).

Christian theology kept us constrained. For example, when a believer sings a song like, “Can’t Nobody Do Me Like Jesus,” we are articulating a theological truth that disempowers us. This is so because as flesh and blood humans, we need an actual human community to survive and thrive in this White Supremacist Society.

Dr. Suggs loved our small community of believers, though it is rather clear to me now that his level of education in all likelihood intimidated the church administration. Philosopher Lewis Gordon asserts, “In attaining a life project everything that happened before it is read into it.”⁴ To be as candid as I can, Philosophy has always been with me Philosophy has sprung concretely from my lived experience if one considers that I grew up in public housing in a place called Sunnyside (which contrary to its name was literally always under a cloud).

This housing development sat adjacent to a dog food and soybean-processing factory. Even to this day, though many years have passed, I can still vividly smell that terrible stench.⁵ As a youngster I was a member of an ethno-drama group. This experience was, in hindsight, vital to me. I loved acting. Being onstage gave me an unbelievable rush. Even more than acting, I fell in love with writing and directing. Even then, I knew almost innately there was power in dialogue. I cannot restate to the reader powerfully enough that I grew up in the Black Church. If one asks me where any orientation that could be called Philosophy developed, it was here. More specifically, my critical orientation developed in Sunday School under the tutelage of Deacon Dewitt Taylor and Deacon Melvin Wright. It was here where I learned about the nature of God, the paradoxical nature of original sin, Jesus, and his unique dualism as totally divine but fully human. Even today as I think about my life and its tumult, the church is always there with me.

4. Yancy, “*Lewis Gordon*.” 96.

5. Though I didn’t know this then, the location of this neighborhood is a textbook case of environmental racism as the neighborhood was placed between a sewage factory, soybean plant, cemetery, and a highway.

Philosopher of Education Robert Nash forwards that, “scholarly personal narrative has been explained to me in the following way: that our own experiences are equally as valuable in terms of research as qualitative or quantitative measurements might be. Each of us is a rich encyclopedia of history and the future draped in a moment called the present.”⁶ The first maxim of Philosophy is “Know Thyself.” This notion is sometimes attributed to Plato and other Greeks, though thanks to the work luminaries such as Joel Augustus Rogers,⁷ Carter Woodson,⁸ and Martin Bernal,⁹ we know most of Greek culture can be attributed to ancient Egyptians. Even here, in a few short lines, the messy conundrum of race and Philosophy emerge. But, in an effort not to put the cart before the proverbial horse, we will return to this conundrum later. I, for one, agree with Nash that each of us is a rich tapestry. I presently am writing this as a young man who has spent many years in graduate school, but faintly, in the back of my mind, I hear the voices of my grandmother, Thelma Johnson; my father, who by the time you read this will be in prison; and my mother, who I have not seen physically in years and who gave me, her first born, to the state of Illinois at the tender age of 12.

Despite the obvious issues with my mother, she is still, to me, an exemplar of faith. Long before I read *Black Liberation Theology*,¹⁰ Carolyn Armstrong taught me about the “Risks of Faith.”¹¹ Before I read Soren Kierkegaard, my mother taught us the lessons of “Fear and

6. Nash, Robert. "Introduction." In *Liberating Scholarly Writing: The Power Of Personal Narrative*,. New York: Teachers College Press,, 2004.

7. “Wikipedia, "Carter G. Woodson." Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carter_G._Woodson. (Accessed April 17, 2014).

8. “Wikipedia. Joel Augustus Rogers," Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joel_Augustus_Rogers (accessed April 22, 2014).

9. “Wikipedia, “Martin Bernal." Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Bernal. (Accessed April 22, 2014).

¹⁰ Bradley, Anthony. *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America*. Wheaton, IL : Crossway Books, 2010

11. Bradley Hagerty, Barbara. "A Closer Look at Black Liberation Theology." All Things Considered. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=88512189> (accessed April 22, 2014)... James Hal Cone, who is founder of Black Liberation Theology asserts “Black liberation theology contends that dominant cultures have corrupted Christianity, and the result is a mainstream faith-based empire that serves its own interests, not God’s. Black liberation theology asks whose side should God be on—the side of

Trembling.”¹² By us, I mean my siblings, Carlos, Kiara, Erica, and myself. The narratives of Jesus have served as the best personification of philosophical embodiment. Though I have a complicated relationship with it now, it was my mother who introduced me to this the greatest institution in Black American life, the Black Church. To put it more concretely, in my estimation my first introduction to Philosophy was not reading Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*,¹³ but rather in the Black Church. Like so many other philosophically inclined individuals, my introduction to the “love of wisdom” was the church. My first institution of philosophical learning was Loving Missionary Baptist Church. It was not the seminar rooms of Springfield College in Illinois or at the University of Illinois at Springfield, and it certainly has not been at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The congregation of Loving Missionary Baptist Church was made up of folks like me. These folks were born in the Southern United States and made the exodus up to the North. These men and women were from the “Dirty South,”¹⁴ to borrow a phrase, put into the national lexicon by the rap group Goodie Mob. This is the same dirty South that produced James Cone (Bearden, Arkansas), Cornel West (Tulsa, Oklahoma), Richard Wright (Jackson, Mississippi), Maya Angelou (Stamps, Arkansas), Angela Davis (Birmingham, Alabama), and Martin Luther King Jr.

the oppressed or the side of the oppressors. If God values justice over victimization, then God desires that all oppressed people should be liberated. According to Cone, if God is not just, if God does not desire justice, then God needs to be done away with. Liberation from a false god who privileges Whites, and the realization of an alternative and true God who desires the empowerment of the oppressed through self-definition, self-affirmation, and self-determination is the core of Black liberation theology.”

12. Kierkegaard, Søren, and C. Stephen Evans. *Fear and trembling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

13. Nietzsche, Friedrich, and Walter Kaufmann. *The portable Nietzsche*. New York: Viking Press, 1960.

14. Goodie Mob’s debut was the Gold-certified album *Soul Food* in (1995), which was produced by Organized Noize and critically acclaimed. It was on this album that the phrase “Dirty South” was actually coined, featured as a song title.+

(Atlanta, Georgia). This region and its Black inhabitants created the only truly American music form, the blues (with apologies to Theodor Adorno's hubris and highbrow racism jazz).¹⁵

Clifford Christians has asserted, "History is the very shank of all disciplines."¹⁶ My history, like most, is the extremely messy history of faith. Despite this knowledge, this is America, the country created by and for both capitalism and slavery. My familial narrative is that of Rosewood, Florida; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and West Helena, Arkansas. I am Black. I am Black and not ashamed, like James Brown told us many years ago. I refuse to be ashamed of this body and its features.

As Franz Fanon and others have taught us so keenly, one of the more troublesome facts about living in a White Supremacist Society such as ours is the extent to which we who are Black internalize White normative values.¹⁷¹⁸ We Blacks look at each other through the eyes of Whites. As comedian and social critic Chris Rock asserts, "Who is more racist Black or Whites? Blacks, because we hate Black people too!"¹⁹ I would be remiss if I did not mention that long before I even encountered Stuart Hall's magisterial text *Race, the Floating Signifier*,²⁰ I knew intuitively that race is enduringly significant. In hindsight, after having carefully studied Hall, I

15. Robinson, J. Bradford. "The Jazz Essays of Theodor Adorno: Some Thoughts On Jazz Reception In Weimar Germany." *Popular Music* 13, (1): 1.

16. Christians, Clifford G. "Utilitarianism in Media Ethics and Its Discontents." *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 22 (1): 113-131.

17. Fanon, Franz, and Maxim Silverman. 'Black skin, white masks'. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005

18 Silverman, Maxim. Frantz Fanon's Black skin, White Masks: New Interdisciplinary Essays. Reprint, Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2012. In this magnificent study argues that, "Fanon uses psychoanalysis and psychoanalytical theory to explain the feelings of dependency and inadequacy that Black people experience in a White world. He speaks of the divided self-perception of the Black Subject who has lost his native cultural originality and embraced the culture of the mother country. As a result of the inferiority complex engendered in the mind of the Black Subject, he will try to appropriate and imitate the cultural code of the colonizer." For this dissertation, the insights of Fanon, obviously this critical insight, provides tremendous probative value for those who are interested in the extent to which internalized White supremacy might actually foster in Black thinkers. For example it could certainly be argued that even if African American philosophers could receive tenure promotion accolades by solely focusing on Black thinkers, it is the author's estimation that a large proportion of Black thinkers would in fact eschew this option and continue to forward the thoughts of White thinkers. Under the current academic system, no Black philosopher can, generally speaking, have as their primary specialization most Black philosophers and they will concentrate their attention to the general area of social and political philosophy.

19. Bring the Pain. Directed by Chris Rock. Beverly Hills, Calif.: DreamWorks Records Home Video, 2002.

20. "Race, The Floating Signifier Featuring Stuart Hall." Directed by Sut Jhally. London: Hillside Studios, 1997.

rightly see the obviousness of my being the progeny of the Black Church in all likelihood obscured its meaning for me. In all sincerity, how could it have taken me this long to become cognizant of how my personal journey into the austere discipline of academic Philosophy started in the church?

The text that follows contains the Philosophy of one who has pursued it at great personal cost. The cost has been mental and spiritual. The African American Philosopher William Edgar Burghardt Dubois once asserted, “That is a horrible thing to live haunted by the ghost of an untrue dream.”²¹ When our foundations are shaken to the point that they fall, everything that rests upon these foundations also must fall. When I undertook the task of this writing, I looked high and low to find a text that incorporated what I wanted to read, and finding no pre-existing text to connect Philosophy, religious faith, and Black-ness to my liking, I had to write the volume you hold in your hand.

My rationale for wanting to use personal narrative and dialogue for writing a dissertation about Philosophy and the Black American experience is rooted in wanting to be true to my roots in the Black narrative tradition on the one hand and be a philosopher of sorts on the other. Let me put it plainly: I was a Black being long before I was a philosophical one. I am not one of those Black thinkers who try to obscure the importance of my race on my thinking. My philosophical thought is inextricably linked to my Blackness or rather my experience growing up as a Black Person in race-obsessed America. I am nearly prepared to say that I do Black Philosophy in part. Here again I refer to the Dubois, who some call the Black Hegel or Black Dewey. As it relates to the discipline of Philosophy, “there is a contribution to the world that only the Black race can

21. Du Bois, W. E. B. . *The Souls of Black Folk* (Dover Thrift Editions). Reprint, Mineola, New York: Dover Publications,, 1994.

make.”²² Ever since Plato, I believe that writing a philosophical treatise using dialogue has been legitimated. But to be rather honest with the reader, more important than disciplinary legitimacy and scholarly rigor, my personal narrative and dialogical approach better facilitate my text’s explanatory value and any potential scholarly value that one may garner will be garnered by my narrative construction of reality. This is a risk, as I want my method to exemplify the theory I am using.

Let me begin here with an admission that it might be said to be at best risky and at worst rather foolhardy, to write academically using narrative methodology as a means to excavate the life world of one’s story. To put it rather crudely, it has been argued by Philosopher Michael Peters, amongst others, “Philosophy is nothing more than the history of Philosophy.”²³ If it is true, then my attempt to unearth a Black Philosophy must be normatively situated in the history of the Black experience. Philosophy must be Black for one who is Black; this must be the case. Philosophy must be Black. In the academic discipline of Theology (the discipline that is said to be Philosophy’s first cousin), James Cone asserts that God must be Black, because for a Black Person in a White Supremacist Society, the only theological hope that can be offered is that hope that can be garnered through the Blackness of God.²⁴ In the discipline of Philosophy, there is no textual absolute that might be said to be analogous to the Bible. In Christian Theology, the Bible is understood to be the basis of one’s faith and behavior.

I will return to the Bible later in this text. For now, let me say that what I want to accomplish here is the construction of a Black philosophical tradition that is organically linked to

22 Du Bois", W. E. B. "The Conservation of Races," The American Negro Academy Occasional Papers, 2 ().

23. Peters, Michael. "White Philosophy in/of America." *Pragmatism Today (PT)*, the online journal of the Central-European Pragmatist Forum (CEPF). 2, ISSUE 1, SUMMER 2011 ().

24. Cone, James H. *Black theology and black power*. Reprint, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, , 1999.

and culturally relevant to the lived experience of Black Folks . This is why much of the following text will appear to some readers to draw from the field of Black Liberation Theology.

Philosopher Tommy J. Curry asserts the following:

Unlike many black specific disciplines in the academy (Black Psychology, Black History, Black Sociology etc.), Black Philosophy never completely forged a unique conceptual framework separate from American and Continental philosophic traditions. Instead the field has continued to define its validity to the extent that black authors extend the thought of white philosophers toward race. This epistemic convergence or the extent, to which black theory converges with established white philosophical traditions and white racial sensibility, continues to misguide many of thought. Because this practice is so dominant, it has made current scholarship in African American and Africana thought derelict in the sense that and hence ideologically driven and not culturally relevant to the actual lives of Africana people.²⁵

It is my assertion that by appropriating tropes and constructs from the Black Liberation Theology that perhaps we get closer to an organic and culturally relevant Black Philosophy. My attempt here is not to be essentialist of Blackness per se, but to excavate a Philosophical Blackness, if you will. For example, Henry Louis Gates in his magisterial text *The Signifying Monkey*,²⁶ argues that, “the Black vernacular is thriving and that it has assumed the singular role as a Black Person ’s ultimate sign of difference, a Blackness of tongue. It is in this vernacular that since slavery, the Black Person has encoded private, yet communal, cultural rituals.”²⁷²⁸²⁹

25. Curry, Tommy. "On Derelict and Method the Methodological Crisis of African-American Philosophy's Study of African-Descended Peoples under an Integrationist Milieu." *Radical Philosophy Review* 14, ().

26. Louis Gates, Henry. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

27. Ibid. In this key work, Professor Gates argues that despite beliefs to the contrary there is an assailable blackness of tongue through signifying.

28 Louis Gates, Henry. "The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique on the Sign and the Signifying Monkey Literary Theory: An Anthology." *Critical Inquiry* 9 (): 685-693). Gates defines two main types of literary Signifying: oppositional (or motivated) and cooperative (or unmotivated). "Unmotivated Signifying" (g) takes the form of the repetition and alteration of another text, which "encodes admiration and respect" and are evidence "not the absence of a profound intention but the absence of a negative critique." Gates more thoroughly focuses on oppositional or motivated Signifying (g) and how it "functions as a metaphor for formal revision, or inter-textually, within the Afro-American literary tradition." Authors reuse motifs from previous works but alter them and "signify" upon them so as to create their own meanings. Ralph Ellison revises or "signifies" upon Richard Wright's work just as Ishmael Reed goes onto signify upon both authors' work and so forth.

29. Birt, R. E. "Negation of hegemony: the agenda of Philosophy Born of Struggle." *Social Science Information* 26 (): 115-127. To this end Birt asserts, "The Afro-American agenda has called into question this claim insofar as one looks simplistically at it in isolation but if

To put it plainly, Gates work seeks to highlight Black Linguistic Praxis in such a manner that posits the uniqueness of Black aesthetic expression through the exploration of connectivity of the Black Vernacular Tradition and the Black Literary Tradition. Much like Gates, my aim is to let the Black tradition of Philosophy speak for itself, even when those individuals practice it who are not readily acknowledged by White academic institutions to be philosophers.

I will attempt to demonstrate in this text that there is a salient and homeopathic philosophical tradition in Black culture, though particularly in Black educational and philosophical literature, which I will use as a reservoir of Black Philosophy. By homeopathic, I simply mean that Blacks have used tools for their oppression as templates for their liberation. Consider that throughout Black history, Blacks have used the textual effects of self-definition and determination while others have used the same text as a means to justify Black subordination. Let me state what I should have from the outset, I will argue in this text that there exists a culturally (here I'm thinking of critical interposition) relevant and cogent philosophical history of the Africana experience, which constitutes a vernacular tradition that I find readily accessible in the thought of W.E.B. Dubois, James Baldwin, Coronel West, and Malcolm X, to name a few.

Chapter Outlines

As mentioned in the outset, the primary questions guiding the research for the period 1950-2012 are what have been the major obstacles to the flourishing of the professional pursuit of Blacks in the academic discipline of Philosophy. I, additionally, seek to ask the questions: what are the pertinent historical strands of a so called Black Philosophy of Education . The first

viewed in a larger dynamic of philosophy being a collection of discourses. The dominant agenda is inclined to be supportive of racism in society. There has been an institutional inclination to exclude Blacks because an agenda consistent with Black culture (or Black experience) is relatively different from the dominant philosophical agenda which only recognizes relevant similarities as important. "This perhaps explains why the overwhelming majority of Black philosophers have a major interest in social and political philosophy as a matter of first principle.

two chapters of this study ask the question: How did I come to Philosophy? They will review the relevant literature and philosophical trends around the question, “What have been the obstacles to the flourishing of Black Philosophy in the United States from 1950-2013?” Additionally, a brief outline of the other chapters in this study will be provided for as well. The third chapter of this study utilizing relevant literature will attempt to establish an account of what would constitute the historical content of a Black Philosophy of Education . By this, who are the intellectual contributors and relevant schools of thought? The narrative of such luminaries as Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. Dubois will be used from the primary and secondary sources from this period. The fourth chapter of the text attempts to elucidate the narratives of Black Philosophers in general and Black Women Philosophers in particular. Special attention will be paid here to the various strains and representative thinkers in each tradition.

Here, like the second chapter, I will attempt to use the narratives of Black Women Philosophers as the primary basis of our textual analysis. The fifth chapter will be primarily concerned with the institutional barriers that preclude Philosophy from being a more inclusive discipline. Chapter five will summarize the major findings and themes of this study and will suggest future questions and directions needed in the study of Black American Philosophy with particular attention paid to graduate education of Black Philosophers with close attention paid to what Ofelia Schutte views as the tripartite of disciplinary exclusion, which are three primary problems which contribute to the challenge of attracting African Americans to the field of Philosophy. They are the problems of the canon, in particular the mainstream (i.e., White supremacist or, as Dr. Peters calls it, the White Philosophy of and in America) understanding of

modern Philosophy setting the ground for the discipline as an epistemic field of racial subordination.³⁰

I am also thinking of Leonard Harris's "'Believe It or Not' or the Ku Klux Klan and American Philosophy Exposed"³¹ and Bill Lawson's "Philosophical Playa Hatin': Race and the Philosophy Game."³² Secondly, the problem of Prestige is addressed. This deals with the hidden curriculum, if you will, of what really counts as what is really Philosophy and this deals with the expectations of those who will reevaluate one for tenure promotion and honorary awards. Here I am thinking of the profound critique leveled by Tommy Curry, in "The Derelictical Crisis of African American Philosophy: How African American Philosophy fails to contribute to the study of African Descended People"³³ which provides an interesting insight that I will undertake at length for its tremendously important probative and explanatory power. Finally, I will look at the problematic predicament of pluralistic philosophical practice. Here I am thinking on the work of one Daria Roithmayr and her "*Barriers to Entry: A Lock-In Model of Racial Inequality*."³⁴

Primary Dissertation Questions

What have been the major obstacles to the flourishing of the professional pursuit of Blacks in the academic discipline of Philosophy? What is the historical content of a Black

30. Schutte, Ofelia, and George Yancy. "Attracting Latinos/as to Philosophy: Today's Challenges." In *Reframing the Practice of Philosophy: Bodies of Color, Bodies of Knowledge*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012.

31. Harris, Leonard. "'Believe It or Not' or the Ku Klux Klan and American Philosophy Exposed." *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 5 (): 133-137.

32. Lawson, Bill, and George Yancy. "Philosophical Playa Hatin': Race and the Philosophy Game." In *Reframing the practice of philosophy: bodies of color, bodies of knowledge*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012.

33. Curry, "On Derelict and Method," p. 315.

34. Roithmayr, Daria. "Barriers to Entry: A Market Lock-in Model of Discrimination." *Virginia Law Review* (86, ()): 727-799.). Daria Roithmayr states the following, "Like firms in the market competition, candidates compete for an opportunity on the basis of ability or merit, which varies widely among individuals. In an efficient market the employer or college the superior candidate based on the candidate's performance on interview, test scores and grades. For markets with limited numbers of opportunities meritocratic competition promotes efficiency it selects applicants who will maximize the value of a job slot or an educational opportunity, achieving the best outcome with limited resources. Conversely race-conscious distribution is understood to be anticompetitive and inefficient because race is not thought to be related to productivity according to the conventional story the color blind market will produce the most efficient outcomes, because it distributes opportunities and resources solely on the basis of ability."

Philosophy of Education ? What are the four strains of African American philosophical thought and what unique contributions can they add to the discipline?

Review of Literature, Research Significance and Contributions to the Field

In the my view, this text provides a unique insight into the corpus of scholarship on Blacks in Philosophy and additionally, it furthers current scholarship being done by adding complexity to the corpus of Black Philosophy and Black philosophers' education. This study is located at the cross-section of Philosophy and African American Studies. The study moves between the ideology of philosophical discipline and the actual historical narrative on and about Black practitioners of Philosophy. It is my most earnest attempt to keep the intellectual unity of both enterprises. In my view, much of the discourse on the profession of Philosophy and its social implications is too abstract, absent one locating it in a specific historical context.

By this, I mean I will attempt to as concretely as possible to tie the theoretical underpinnings of Philosophy and professional theory to the historical reality of those Blacks who have dared to undertake the philosophical enterprise. The narrative framework of which this text is derived is constituted from a comprehensive theoretical excavation and in-depth reading of sociology of professional occupations, Philosophy, etc., as well as a critical reading of all available literature on using Critical Race Theory as a methodology. It is with this in mind, I forward that this study differs from existing research and its primary value is the discourse around what it is to be Black and a Philosopher.

I contend that Philosophy, or the philosopher as a concept, has morphed from a characteristic or personality trait of a particular person to being instantiated by a specific person, in a similar vein much like the concept of genius, an individual in times past could be alleged to possess a certain type of genius. The genius now is not seen as an attribute of a person but as a

particular person. It is with this in mind that we will excavate the extent to which being a philosopher is a specific person. What are the racial implications of this phenomenon? One of the more original concepts introduced in the text is my concept of the “*Critical Race Moment*” and “*White Autism*.” I have heretofore never come across these two terms, and it is my attempt through this text to further elucidate this terminology. “White Autism” is the inability of many White brothers and sisters to make their experiences in an empathic way with the racial other.

Theoretical Framework

In my estimation, Critical Race Theory best embodies a theoretical basis by which to both critique and reconfigure the academic discipline and philosophical discourse with respect to race. Rooted in my earlier comments, I have a commitment to qualitative social change. As we shall see, Critical Race Theory is the progeny of Critical Theory Angela Davis, asserts that

Critical Theory envisions Philosophy not so much as an abstract or general engagement with questions of human existence, rather it envisions a productive relationship with Philosophy and other disciplines. For example, Sociology, Cultural Studies, Feminist Theory, African American Studies, and the use of this knowledge is simply the Critical Theory as formulated and founded by the Frankfurt School which included Horkheimer and Marcuse has as its goal the transformation of society not simply the transformation of ideas, but social transformation and thus reduction and elimination of human misery. It was on this basis of this insistence on the social implementation of critical ideas that I was able to envision a relationship between Philosophy and Black liberation.³⁵

It is now widely held in leftist academic circles that Critical Race Theory (CRT) materialized in the late 1970's from progressive legal scholarship that examined how the law is complicit in upholding White social advantage. Critical Race Theorists deconstruct liberalism in order to explicate the ways in which concepts of liberalism, such as the slow but steady road to change color-blindness, neutrality, and objectivity do more to strengthen White supremacy than

35. Yancy, George. "Angela Davis," In *African-American philosophers: 17 conversations*, New York: Routledge, 1998.

to dismantle it.³⁶ By insisting on a historical as well as socio-cultural context of experience, CRT is a worldview that places race at the epicenter of every discussion and every experience. Critical Race Theory asks each of us to shift our understanding of what is real from the dominant discourse and to listen to counter-stories of the people whose experience lives outside of the majority.³⁷

Fundamental tenets of CRT include the notion that White Supremacy, rather than being unusual or an example aberrant behavior, is normal and necessary. It is not aberrant and is the usual business in this country. This is especially true since the Civil Rights Era when it became illegal to treat people differently because of their skin color. Since many acts of White Supremacy have become dangerously subtle, while only the overt acts are illegal, it has become increasingly difficult to cure ongoing acts of racism.³⁸ A second tenet reflects the CRT practice of speaking from the voice of the oppressed. Often, the voices are heard in the form of storytelling in which “writers analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render Black and other minorities’ one-down.”³⁹ A third tenet of CRT speaks to the principle known as Interest Convergence, which suggests that “the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of Whites.”⁴⁰

36. Delgado, Richard, and Jean Stefancic. *Critical race theory an introduction*. New York: New York University Press, 2001.

37. Dixon, Adrienne D. *Critical race theory in education: all God's children got a song*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

38. Crenshaw, Kimberlé. *Critical race theory: the key writings that formed the movement*. New York: New Press: 1995.

39. Delgado, Richard. "Introduction." In *Critical race theory: the cutting edge*, 3rd ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013.

40. Bell, Derrick. "Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma. *Harvard Law Review* 93 (): 518-34.

Critical Race Theory's underpinnings in Critical Legal Studies

Critical Race Theory is the progeny of the Critical Legal Studies Movement, which itself is the progeny of the larger Critical Theory Movement. Critical Race Theory was the brainchild of left-leaning and/or Marxist intellectuals who believed then, as they do now, that the legal system is structured in such a way that it perpetuates class hierarchies.

Devotees of Critical Race Theory became frustrated with the systematic roll backs of hard-fought gains in the area of civil rights legislation and social justice policy forwarded by right wing think tanks, politics, and policy. Additionally Critical Race Theorists found it necessary to split from the Critical Legal Studies Movement as they found the movement being insufficient in this analysis of the extent to which race was the dominant factor in the American social sphere.

To put it rather crudely, Critical Race Theory's movement of academic literature and intellectual activists are prominently, though not exclusively, members of so-called out groups. The movement had its genesis initially amongst law professors of color and is spread across numerous other academic disciplines in today's modern academy. Critical Race Theorists articulate the necessity of communities of color to reject Eurocentric notions of modernity with its pretense of both neutrality and objectivity. Finally, adherents of Critical Race Theory put a premium on experiential knowledge and the belief in interdisciplinary study. In my examination, it could be argued that Critical Race Theory has an additional tenant, namely that of counter narrative storytelling.

This practice is unique in that it attempts to be oppositional to the dominant social discourse. Richard Delgado, one of the pioneers of Critical Race Theory, provides tremendous explanatory value for us when he put forth the following about

Dominant Narrative Discourse:

My premise is that much of social reality is constructed. We decide what is and almost simultaneously what ought to be. Narrative habits patterns of seeing shape what we see and that to which what we aspire. These patterns a perception become habitual; they tempt us to believe that these things are inevitable or minimally the best that we can be in an imperfect world. Dominant narrative does not allow alternative visions of reality they are not explored or if they are rejected as extreme more implausible.⁴¹

According to Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic,⁴² key early contributors to CRT were most often legal scholars of color, though not exclusively.⁴³ Delgado and Stefancic⁴⁵ suggest that Derrick Bell was the movement's intellectual father figure.⁴⁶

Critical Race Moments⁴⁷ and Counternarrative Storytelling: A Methodological Framework.⁴⁸

Counter-narrative storytelling attempts to bring a more emancipatory and cohesive unity to stories through efforts to create a counter reality. And this enterprise is seen as authentic insofar as it in words and tone rejects mainstream (i.e., White) philosophical precepts. They also

41. Delgado, Richard. "Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative." *Michigan Law Review* 87 (): 2411-2441.

42. Ibid.

43. The author, amongst others, are here referring to the earlier works of scholars Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B. Dubois, both of who both used race as a theoretical lens for assessing social inequity

44. Ladson-Billings, Gloria, and William Tate. "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education." *Teachers College Record* 97 (): 47-68. ". Ladson-Billings and Tate, first introduced Critical Race Theory to education they argue although Brown v. Board of Education called for the integration of schools, it did not accomplish the task of creating schools that were equal. The intersection of race and property develops further as a key determinant of inequity in education when White is described as property. Referring to the work of legal scholar Cheryl Harris in 1993, Ladson-Billings and Tate discuss Whiteness as property in the context of education. "When students are rewarded only for conformity to perceived 'White norms' or sanctioned for cultural practices (e.g., dress, speech patterns, unauthorized conceptions of knowledge). White property is being rendered alienable. Simply by being able to transfer what you are, that is, White, to your children, affords them certain rights of entitlement

45. Delgado, Richard, and Jean Stefancic. *Critical White studies: looking behind the mirror*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.

46. Bell, Derrick. *And We Are Not Saved: The Permanence of Racism*. New York: Basic Books, 1987.

47. A term I have coined to describe moments of racial antagonistic situations that are heightened by ones familiarity with this corpus of literature.

48. Outlaw Jr, Lucius, Shannon Sullivan, and Nancy Tuana -. "Social Ordering and the Systematic Production of Ignorance." In *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.

further are distinguished by their attempts at being rather stylistically different than the dominant narrative. A pioneer of Critical Race Theory, Richard Delgado, forwards that

Stories are the oldest, most primordial meeting ground in human experience. Their allure will often provide the most effective means of overcoming otherness, of forming a new collectivity based on the shared story. This proliferation of counter stories is not an accident or coincidence. Oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation. Members of out-groups can use stories in two basic ways: first, as means of psychic self-preservation and, second, as means of lessening their own subordination.⁴⁹

As I referenced earlier, there is a long and rich tradition of Black narrative, which might be seen as unique to the Black American Experience. In the Black Prophetic Christian Tradition of which I am the progeny, ones story matters. In my estimation, there is an inextricable link between meanings and narrative; even until this very day I can remember going to or mid-week service for Bible study and testimony. This ritual was a necessary part of a believer's faith walk. One had to tell one's story if one wanted to be right with the Lord. In hindsight this had to have a tremendous impact on me, especially if the reader considers Hayden White, who states:

To raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself. So natural is the impulse to narrate, so inevitable is the form of narrative for any report of the way things really happened, that narrativity [sic] could appear problematical only in a culture in which it was absent- or, as in some domains of contemporary Western intellectual and artistic culture, programmatically refused. As a pan global fact of culture, narrative and narration are fewer problems than simply data. As the late (and already profoundly missed) Roland Barthes remarked, narrative "is simply there like life itself . . . international, trans historical, transcultural." Far from being a problem, then, narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling.⁵⁰

Professor White's insight is that we must narrate; we must tell stories as humans. This is how meaning is made. It is also important to note, in my estimation that we narrate from our own

49. Ibid. Delgado, "Storytelling

50. White, Hayden. "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality." *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 7, (1): 5-27.

subjective experiences. In my view, much of what we know is in some way self-referential. To put it another way, one's subjective position does have much meaning as to how one will view the world. To this end, Michael Peters forwards that, "White Philosophers have difficulty telling the story of Black Philosophy or make use of Black Consciousness."⁵¹ To be sure, the academics of Philosophy does describe that narrative is rooted out of an "Epistemological Ignorance"⁵² particularly as it pertains to race. Daniel G. Solorzano and Tara Yosso in their seminal work *Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research*⁵³ forward that in order to use counter narrativity well, one must possess two things: Theoretical Sensitivity and Cultural Intuition. They define Theoretical Sensitivity as

A personal quality of the researcher that indicates an awareness of the subtleties of the meaning of data. One can come to a research situation with varying degrees of sensitivity depending upon previous readings and experiences with or relevant to data. It can also be developed further during the research process. Theoretical sensitivity refers to the attribute of having insight—the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand and capability to separate the pertinent from that which is not."⁵⁴

Cultural Intuition bespeaks to the ability of an author to narrate from the subjective positionality of the genre of story that is being told. The following stories you will read in this text are classic composite stories.

Composite stories and narratives draw on various forms of "data" to recount the racialized, sexualized, and classed experiences of people of color. Such counter-stories may offer both biographical and autobiographical analyses because the authors create

51. Peters, Michael. "White Philosophy in and of America." In *Education, philosophy and politics: the selected works of Michael A. Peters*, Milton Park, Abingdon, and Oxon: Routledge, 2012.

52. Ibid, Outlaw Jr., "Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance."

53. Solórzano, Daniel, and Teri Yosso. "Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research." *Qualitative Inquiry* 23 (): 23-44 *Qualitative Inquiry* 23 (2002). Authors define Critical Race Methodology as a theoretically grounded approach to research that foregrounds race and racism in the research process; however, it also challenges that separate discourses on race, gender and class by showing how these three elements intersect to effect the experience of students of color. It challenges the traditional texts used to explain the experiences of students of color, offers a liberator or transformative solution to racial gender and class subordination and focuses on the racialized, gendered and class experience of students of color; furthermore, it these sources as sources of strength and Critical Methodology uses an interdisciplinary knowledge base of Ethnic Studies, Women's Studies, Sociology, History, Humanities, and Law to better understand the experience of students of color.

54. Ibid ,White "Value Of Narrativity"

composite characters and place them in social, historical, and political situations to discuss racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination.⁵⁵⁵⁶

The following text might be rightly seen as part autobiography. I have purposefully constructed the characters' dress and mannerisms because it is my direct attempt at problematizing performative notions of one's race. The performative aspects of one's race differ from one's prescribed race, as they are not matters of physical ascription. Professor Judith Butler famously puts forth an explanation in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*,⁵⁷ of the extent to which gender is a performative act.

Though this theory was originally intended to be a tool for feminist thinkers, I think Professor Butler's theory is of tantamount importance to those of us interested in understanding the contours of American racial caste system (And for those of us who are concerned with formulation of a Critical Theory Of Racism.). Extrapolating from Professor Butler, it is my contention that with respect to race in the United States. First, in my estimation, an individual does not have a racial identity prior to the articulation of where they fit into a racial paradigm.

Secondly, the racial situation is a perennial process, which is reaffirmed through the use of symbolic acts. Generally the symbolic acts are aesthetic in nature. These acts are ineffectual if they are not readily intelligible to others. And finally, I believe that these acts of a performative identity are vital in that they provide the racial individual with a sense of agency. It is with this articulation that I created the characters you will soon meet. Consider Goines, who is an amalgam of myself and several relatives. In my estimation he actively sports styles that are attributable to urban African-Americans in general. More specifically, his style of dress is

55. Delgado, "Storytelling for Oppositionists."

56. Greene, Linda. "A Short Commentary on the Chronicles." *Harvard Blackletter law Journal* 60); See Also Parrish, Lydia Austin, and Creighton Churchill. *Slave songs of the Georgia Sea Islands*. New York: Creative Age Press, 1942

57. Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

attributable to a certain kind of African American. I envision a sizable preponderance of the readers would not think this type of African American as capable of engaging our White antagonist in a manner which will ensue in the rest of this text.

The character Cerno is a homage based on my dear friend Michael Christian Ceronovich who was my undergraduate roommate at University of Illinois at Springfield. A Pepperdine University Law graduate, he is now practicing in the Los Angeles area. Later in the text, the reader will be introduced to Agape Marie, who is loosely based on Tasha Marie Love, a former love interest of mine who holds a Masters in both Architecture and Urban Planning from the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign.

The following conversation is about Philosophy and why, in many ways, it has gone out of its disciplinary way, if you will, to remain White in terms of its worldview. When reviewing several newspapers and journals I came across several articles calling for the discipline of Philosophy to change course and straighten its sails, if you will. When reading this initial narrative, it's important to remember that I might raise issues in an effort to address them more concretely later in the larger dissertation. For example, Cerno and Goines discuss the perceptual Whiteness and inquiry in my section entitled "*Actions of Affirmation: Combating Stereotype Threat, the Implicit Biases in Philosophical and Legal Education with Suggestions for the Institutional Future*" when discussing what I and others deem as barriers to entry. The reader will learn about how these barriers manifest differently for Black Women and Men. Black Women seem to posit very different reasons than do Black Men for going into and staying in the discipline. The character named the "Good Doctor" is loosely based on one Dr. George Yancy, who has made a tremendous contribution to Africana Philosophy through his far-reaching efforts to build the canon of Black philosophical texts, through his efforts to tackle issues regarding the

Black body in an anti-Black world, and through his indefatigable efforts to examine Whiteness. But it is not the sheer quantity of work that is so noteworthy; rather, it is also the quality of his work, which is of the highest order.

Yancy is what I consider to be a model example of what a really engaged philosopher should be. In this regard, his only peers are three of the contributors to his magisterial text, *African-American Philosophers: 17 Conversations*,⁵⁸ which I believe is his finest book to date. Here, I am thinking of Angela Davis, Lewis Gordon (a Yale classmate of his), and Cornel West. All four scholars are, in my opinion, philosophers *par excellence*. *African-American Philosophers: 17 Conversations*, is a work that forever altered the trajectory of my life in a profound way. To use urban Black linguistic parlance, “Keep it 100 with you.” This book saved me. I fell in love with the possibility of being both Black and a philosopher. That’s the power of exposure to a young, pliable, and impressionable mind, as I was in my twenties when I first read Yancy’s book. I carried it around so much that it functioned as a “secular-scripture” for me. In one of his sermons, Reverend Jeremiah Wright asserted that, “One can’t be what one has never seen. For many of my young men, they have never met a Black man with two or three degrees.”⁵⁹ The discipline of Philosophy is no different. Exposure is the key. It is because of my exposure to the work of Yancy that you hold this text in your hand.

According to African American Philosopher George Yancy in his seminal text in the history of African American Philosophy entitled *African-American Philosophers: 17 Conversations*, he asserts that

58. Yancy, George, and George Yancy. "Introduction." In *African-American philosophers: 17 conversations*, New York: Routledge, 1998.

59. "Moyers, Bill." "Reverend Jeremiah Wright." *BILL MOYERS JOURNAL*, <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/04252008/profile.html> (accessed April 25, 2014).

Dialectical conversations, after all, are complex sociolinguistic interactions that function as sites of fecundity, richness, openness, tension, and contestation. And, as is well known, there are many instances of dialectical conversation in the history of Western Philosophy. One can find this in Plato's dialogues, in the correspondences between Descartes and Elizabeth of Bohemia, and in exchanges between Bertrand Russell and Frederick Copleston.⁶⁰

And in his work, *Dialogue, Dialectic, and Conversation: A Social Perspective on the Function of Writing*, Gregory Clark asserts that,

Martin Heidegger, for example, wrote, "our being...is founded in language" and language "only becomes actual in conversation," an activity he defined as "speaking with others about something for the purpose of bringing about "the process of coming together." From this definition, Heidegger could argue, "conversation and its unity support our existence" and, indeed, "we ... are a conversation." And although this is the process Martin Buber described as dialogue, he used the term *conversation* to suggest his notion of the ideal dialogue. For Buber, "genuine conversation" is a dialogue in which each participant "has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relationship between him and them."⁶¹

It is with the following insight in mind that I have structured this text in the frame of a conversation. Returning to Martin Heidegger, who is known to have asserted on several occasions that, "any interpretation which is to contribute understanding, must have already have understood what is to be interpreted."⁶² When examining a text, whether that text is the Bible or James Baldwin's *Just above My Head*,⁶³ one generally is only able to glean from a particular work other interpretations we already understand as the basis of analysis. The logical circularity of this problem, which Cornel West does not imagine too vicious as it potentially provides new meaning and novel insights, while thus simultaneously acknowledge, are inherent limitations. In

60. Yancy, *17 Conversations*. See Yancy, George. *What White looks like: African-American philosophers on the Whiteness question*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

61. Yancy, *17 Conversations*

62. West, Cornel, Tommy Lott, and John Pittman, "Philosophy and the African American Experience." In *A companion to African-American philosophy*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003.

63. Baldwin, James. *Just above my head*. New York: Dial Press, 1979.

a similar vein, the African-American Philosopher Lewis R. Gordon rearticulates this paradox by asserting that which I cite for its probative value:

In attaining a life project, everything before it becomes read into it. This process of narrative sense of the past as it stands in relationship with the present and vice versa stems from a desire for our lives to be thematically intelligible and existentially meaningful. Otherwise vague, incoherent and disparate experiences are eventually reshaped into a unified plot. One's life is not understood as a series of episodic and disconnected set of events but as an interconnected whole, replete with rich hermeneutical possibilities''⁶⁴

The dialogue that follows is heavily influenced by the work *African-American Philosophers: 17 Conversations*. It is my attempt to interpose my position through the question "How does Melvin come to Philosophy?"

64. Yancy, George. "Lewis Gordon." In *African-American philosophers: 17 conversations*, New York: Routledge, 1998.

Chapter 2

Dirty South Born, Sunnyside Raised, and the Reasons I Came to Philosophy

Now the crucial paradox which confronts us here is that the whole process of education occurs within a social framework and is designed to perpetuate the aims of society. Thus, for example, the boys and girls who were born during the era of the Third Reich, when educated to the purposes of the Third Reich, became barbarians. The paradox of education is precisely this—that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated. The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity. But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around. What societies really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society. If a society succeeds in this, that society is about to perish. The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it—at no matter what risk. This is the only hope society has. This is the only way societies change.⁶⁵

African American Philosopher George Yancy, in arguably the seminal text in the history of African American Philosophy entitled *African-American Philosophers: 17 Conversations*, asserts that,

Dialectical conversations, after all, are complex sociolinguistic interactions that function as sites of fecundity, richness, openness, tension, and contestation. And, as is well known, there are many instances of dialectical conversation in the history of Western Philosophy. One can find this in Plato's dialogues, in the correspondences between Descartes and Elizabeth of Bohemia, and in exchanges between Bertrand Russell and Frederick Copleston. And in his work, *Dialogue, Dialectic, and Conversation: A Social Perspective on the Function of Writing* Gregory Clark asserts the following that "Martin Heidegger, for example, wrote, "our being...is founded in language" and language "only becomes actual in conversation," an activity he defined as "speaking with others about something for the purpose of bringing about "the process of coming together." From this definition, Heidegger could argue, "conversation and its unity support our existence" and, indeed, "we ... are a conversation." And although this is the process Martin Buber described as dialogue, he used the term *conversation* to suggest his notion of the ideal dialogue. For Buber, "genuine conversation" is a dialogue in which each participant "has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relationship between him and them."⁶⁶

It is with the following insight in mind that I have structured this chapter's text in the frame of a dialogical conversation. Returning to Martin Heidegger⁶⁷ who is known to have

65. Baldwin, James. "A Talk to Teachers." In *The price of the ticket: collected nonfiction, 1948-1985*, New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1985.

66. Yancy, *17 Conversations*. See also George Yancy, *What White Looks Like*.

67. It may be noted that Martin Heidegger was the author of *Being and Time*, which is considered one of the most important philosophical works of the 20th century. The author had some reservations about mentioning him in this text as he was in fact a supporter of the

asserted on several occasions that in his description of the so-called hermeneutic circle “any interpretation which is to contribute understanding, must have already understood what is to be interpreted.”⁶⁸ When examining a text, whether that text is the Bible or James Baldwin’s “The Price of the Ticket,”⁶⁹ one generally is only able to glean from particular work other interpretations we already understand as the basis of analysis. The circularity of this problem is not necessarily vicious as it potentially provides new meaning and novel insights while thus simultaneously acknowledges our inherent limitations.⁷⁰ In a similar vein, the African-American Philosopher Lewis R. Gordon rearticulates this paradox by asserting that which I cite for its probative value.

“In attaining a life project, everything before it becomes read into it. This process of narrative sense of the past as it stands in relationship with the present and vice versa stem from a desire for our lives to be thematically intelligible and existentially meaningful. Otherwise vague, incoherent and disparate experiences are eventually reshaped into a unified plot. One’s life is not understood as a series of episodic and disconnected set of event but as an interconnected whole replete with rich hermeneutical possibilities”⁷¹

The dialogue that follows is heavily influenced by the work *African-American Philosophers: 17 Conversations*. It is my attempt to interpose my position through the question “How does Melvin come to Philosophy?”

Good Doctor: Where were you born and where did you come of age?

Melvin: I was born in Memphis, Tennessee, though my mother and father are from Osceola, Arkansas. This area of the Mississippi River delta is, by some statistical accounts, the

Nazi regime. He was also an influential instructor to Herbert Marcuse. For an insightful view on Marcuse’s understandable disillusionment with the failings of his mentor, see Herbert Marcuse, Martin Heidegger and Richard Wolin, “Herbert Marcuse and Martin Heidegger: An Exchange of Letters,” *New German Critique* 53 (1991): 28-32.

68. Heidegger, Martin, and David Farrell Krell. “The Origin of the Work of Art.” In *Basic Writings*, New York: Harper Collins, 1977.

69. Baldwin, “The Price of the Ticket.”

70. West, Cornel. “Philosophy and the Afro-American Experience,” *The Philosophical Forum* 9 (): 117-148.148.

71. Lewis Gordon in Yancy, *17 Conversations*.

poorest congressional district in the United States. Soon after my birth, my parents' relationship became rocky, and my mother, who had always wanted to flee the South, decided to leave, so she took me to Bloomington, Illinois. Well, that's not actually correct. What happened was my mother wanted to get to Chicago as my Ant (Aunt) Brenda had left the South and landed in the New South, the wonderful south side of Chicago. But as fate would have it, as the story is told to me, my momma had hitched a ride with my father's cousins (though as a youngster I always thought of them as my aunts).

My Aunts Remel, Linda, Janet, and AmaJean began to have car trouble around St. Louis and the car broke down in this place called Bloomington, Illinois, and as they say, the rest is history. My Aunt Remel got a job at Beichs Candy Company. My mother decided to stay with my Aunt Remel, which I must say was always curious to me. I just could not understand how she wanted to escape my father by staying with his first cousins. My mother was very resourceful, so she arranged to have us move to the Sunnyside Court Housing Projects.

Good Doctor: How did growing up in Sunnyside shape your early philosophical consciousness?

Melvin: Well, I think growing up where I did influenced me greatly, as it was a majority Black enclave in a vastly White city. Sunnyside is the place where I first began to really think about race and poverty. Though I did not know it then, I think I realized that there was more than just class subordination, to our lived oppression. This is so because Sunnyside sat very near a trailer park that was largely occupied by what some flagrantly classist folks would describe as "Poor White Trash."⁷² According to Sociologist John Harrington

72. Newitz, Annalee, and Matt Wray, *White Trash: Race and Class in America*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

White Trash is a cultural figure and rhetorical identity that is a means of inscribing social distance and insisting upon a contempt laden social divide particularly (though not exclusively) to Whites. The name is applied and it sticks with various results to mutable groups of people bearing certain socially stigmatized traits or characteristics the context in which it is used and the position of those using the term are constructive of the reality of White Trash as a historical coherence of those so named. In this regard White Trash exists in the fears and fantasies of those middle and working class Whites who occupy a place just above the class divide for poor Whites, straddling a line they are forever fearful of crossing. In this sense poor Whites and White Trash might look alike and sound alike but they are quite different-subjects.”⁷³

I always thought about how these so called trashy folks always acted as if they were better than us. This I always assumed because these folks, despite being poor, were still White. And though I didn’t know of Cheryl Harris’ “Whiteness as Property,”⁷⁴ then, I still knew almost intuitively that both my class and race would impact my circumstances in life significantly. Additionally growing up in Sunnyside implicitly introduced me to the Philosophy of the built environment. What I mean here is that I knew intuitively that how this neighborhood looked meant something about our social standing.

Sunnyside was surrounded by a sewage treatment plant on one side, another side had a dog food factory; this peninsula of poverty was walled off by a cemetery and train tracks. I know that my White classmates did not live in neighborhoods that had this stench of dog food being made. There are, of course other connections as well. Because I lived in Sunnyside I was bussed to Sheridan Elementary, even though Raymond Elementary was literally two blocks away. Since I was an observant child I also knew that the entirety of Bloomington was not like Sunnyside.

Good Doctor: What do you mean?

73. Harris, Cheryl. "Whiteness as Property." *Harvard Law Review* 106 (1993) (): 1707-1791.

74. Harris, Whiteness as Property."

Melvin: There is this little company called State Farm Insurance, which is based out of Bloomington, or as folks like to call it, the cult of State Farm. Or Snake Farm. Because of State Farm, there are some very affluent neighborhoods in Bloomington. A wonderful woman from my church, Cheryl Mosley, would come and pick my brother and me up and take us to the east side of Bloomington. We were “Westsidiers” because Sunnyside is on the far west side of town; as one heads west in Bloomington, the percentages of poverty and minorities increase. In hindsight, I realize now that Mrs. Mosely saw something in me and my brother Carlos. Mrs. Mosley wanted to show my brother and me how the other half lived and I do not think she was being paternalistic at all. She was and to this day is just a sweet woman. Her kids had all the best toys; they had an air hockey and foosball table in their basement. I remember being floored by this: Black people with an actual basement and a big yard. They also had a little toaster oven, and they made my brother and me these little pizzas out of an English muffin. You know, being a ghetto child, I had never had bread like that before. Still to this very day I love English muffins, not more than the southern style biscuits of my mother’s, but I do have a real affinity for the way they toast up.

Being in that Eastside world I felt like an interloper in realm that was not meant for me. In some ways, I have always felt like an outsider as I have always been part of subgroups that were all White. For example, I was on the Debate Team, the Chess Team, the Scholastic Bowl Team, and was always in Student Government. But because I was poor, I would not ever be dressed as nice as the White kids for these events.

Good Doctor: How influential were your parents in terms of your intellectual development?

Melvin: They were both very key for me in very different ways. My father was what some might call an autodidactic. Now mind you, this is a man who would, throughout my childhood, be in and out of prison. Despite this, he taught himself a lot. He loved to read. I think my love of reading in many ways stems from him. He forced my siblings and me to read every day. My father always had us reading anything he could get his hands on. I remember one day, he and I were walking from the bus stop and he spotted what appeared to be a book in the trash. We proceeded to rummage through the garbage dump for maybe half an hour until we were able to recover most of what were the Great Books Foundation Readers. How someone in Sunnyside had these texts still in some respects is a mystery to me. I remember vividly that my father was supremely excited by this occurrence. He loved to watch PBS; his favorite shows were NOVA and National Geographic Explorer. This was vital for my reading, and watching educational TV made me aware that the world was much bigger than Sunnyside. My dad took education, no rather schooling, very seriously. He never finished high school growing up. My worst beatings were from my inability to do something academic. I still remember the beating I took from my inability to spell phone correctly (“fone” is how I spelled it). For both my mother and father education was the means to get a so-called “good” job.

Now it might rightly be asserted that my mother may have been the key contributor to my intellectual development, as she took me to church all the time. Though I did not realize it then, being a progeny of the Black Church would provide fertile philosophical soil that I would later till. My mother instilled a great amount of humility and hope, though she introduced me to my first great intellectual disappointment of life.

Good Doctor: Which was?

Melvin: I was about eight or nine at the time and I conveyed to my mother that I had a desire to read every book ever printed. She smiled at my audacity, sat me down, and explained to me that it would be impossible for me to accomplish this task. I know now that both my mother and father did not get my love of learning, though they encouraged it in all the ways they could.

Good Doctor: If you had to trace your philosophical identity, provide a short list of thinkers and texts that influenced you.

Melvin: Well, I would like to distinguish the early influences that shaped me from the texts and thinkers I came to know about as an undergraduate or graduate student. Early on, I was influenced strongly by Malcolm X. I remember reading the autobiography of Malcolm X ten or eleven times by the time I was 14. I believe his story is even more relevant today than when it was first penned, as there are many people who are currently ensnared by the legal system and could take to his narrative as he, in fact, was a felon who turned his life around. In fact, much of my initial interest in the Nation of Islam was because it was the organization that I thought created Malcolm.

Though, I know now that this is true only in part, as Malcolm's early life showed that he had a tremendous intellectual gift. In fact, in eighth grade, I had all my teachers refer to me as X. The only name I would answer to was X. So you understand, they did not call me Melvin X, they called me X. I always loved going to the library and listening to Malcolm's speeches. I would get chills. Then there was James Baldwin, who I remember reading and I was awestruck by the manner in which he wrote in *The Fire Next Time*.⁷⁵ I was moved by this man stating to "White America that the only thing that Black America wanted that White America had was power."⁷⁶

75. Baldwin, James. *The fire next time*. New York: Dell Press, 1963.

76. Baldwin, *Fire Next Time*.

Let me state here that I agree very much with the notion that Dewey is credited with when he states “Philosophy is a life practice, not simply a field of theoretical knowledge.”⁷⁷ For me, Baldwin was an example of this. I was always struck by his intellectual honesty and fearlessness. And in my own life, I have always wanted to be like him; he was honest and forthright. When I got older, I gained even more respect from him as I learned that Baldwin wrote a screenplay for what was to be a movie about the life story of Malcolm X. But he never got traction on it because it was not a hatchet job on Malcolm. Baldwin humanized Malcolm X and this has always been important to me as a youngster. Even though we were poor, my mother was a key example because she would not do anything for just money and I internalized this message.

When I was young, I wanted to be a writer, but after reading Baldwin I was struck by a sheer sense of disappointment and fright as I knew intuitively that I could never have the aptitude that would allow the ability to write as he did. And if I am honest with you, this has always been a struggle for me—expressing myself through the written medium. My teachers always would say that if I could just improve my writing, I would be so much more effective in communicating. This was always a two-pronged criticism, as I felt this is really a subtle racial comment. I felt that the subtext of this was that I did not write “White.” Now, I am all for teachers making sure that their students can write in such a way that they have alacrity of thought. I do not run from that, but knowing the conventions of writing and being able to write are two substantively different things just like being able to play a sport and being able to analyze a sport are different things. Cerno always says, “Melvin, your writing is so much better than in undergrad, but you still write like a Black guy. To which I say, “I am a proud Black guy, my brother.”

77. Peterson, Forrest H. *John Dewey's Reconstruction in philosophy*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1987.

The reason why Baldwin was also someone I was drawn to is that he struggled with religion as I have. I do not think his struggle was simply a matter of his sexual biography. One of my key moments of development came to me when I was younger and I heard Malcolm's "Message to the Grassroots." Malcolm states that the Black Civil Rights Establishment in the March on Washington "was a sellout. It was a takeover. When James Baldwin came in from Paris, they would not let him talk, 'because they couldn't make him go by the script. Burt Lancaster read the speech that Baldwin was supposed to make; they wouldn't let Baldwin get up there, 'because they know Baldwin's liable to say anything.'"⁷⁸

I really feel that this statement is a goldmine yet to be thoroughly excavated particularly for Feminist Theory and Queer Theory devotees. Malcolm's reconstruction of masculinity floored me. For many, Malcolm X was the best instantiation of Black Masculinity, so what are the implications of him lauding and doting on an openly Gay Man, a Black Man. As I said before, history was important to me. I read all the works of J.A. Rogers⁷⁹ by the time I was in the eighth grade. Of particular importance to me was his "*100 Amazing Facts about the Negro with Complete Proof*"⁸⁰ and his magisterial *World's Great Men of Color, Volume I and II*.⁸¹ Now remember I came to this information as a pre-teen and early teenager, thus I think it affects me more than folks who came to this knowledge say in college or graduate studies. I take it for granted in some ways. For me, knowing that Black Folks had made the contribution they had was incredible to me. Lastly and certainly not least, we have to speak about Cornel West.

78. X., Malcolm. "Message to Grassroots," Teaching American History. <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/message-to-grassroots/>. (Accessed April 24, 2014).

79. "Wikipedia. Joel Augustus Rogers." Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joel_Augustus_Rogers (accessed April 25, 2014).

80. Rogers, Joel Augustus. *Sex and Race: A History of White, Negro, and Indian Miscegenation in the Two Americas, Volume II: The New World*. Reprint, New York: Helga Rogers, 1970.

81. Rogers, Joel Augustus. *World's Great Men of Color, Volume I: Asia and Africa, and Historical Figures Before Christ, Including Aesop, Hannibal, Cleopatra, Zenobia, Askia the Great, and Many Others*. Reprint, New York: Touchstone; 1996.

His work *Prophecy Deliverance: A Revolutionary Afro-American Christianity*⁸² had a tremendous impact on me, as at the time I was an observant Muslim. I even had my name changed to Messiah Jihad Quran. Cornel West was the first so-called Black Academic Philosopher I encountered. This was a key encounter, as it provided me, a self-described child of the ghetto, much needed exposure. Because of this example, I could imagine myself as a philosopher in a very different way. He made it more a concrete possibility, though I had looked up several times what a philosopher was and I wanted to be that. To be rather candid, I wanted to be Cornel West. The other reason why Cornel West was vital to me was it was through West that I came to become familiar with the work of James Cone. I remember reading accounts of how Dr. West's favorite book when he was a neophyte scholar was James Cone's *Black Power, Black Theology*. For me, it was his awe inspiring *Martin & Malcom & America: A Dream or a Nightmare*.⁸³

Cone shaped me tremendously. In some ways, I went back to my original faith tradition because of my sustained encounter with James Cone. He gave the theoretical underpinnings for the assertion that through Black Folks' belief in Jesus, we conquered the institution of slavery. If Jesus got my great-grandmother through that particular institution, there is nothing that I will ever face that He cannot bring me out of. Cone also points to the fact that there are strong parallels between Black Americans and the children of Israel of the Bible in his work *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*⁸⁴ for devotees of Black Studies. What I take to be Cone's primary message was the fact that both crucifixion and lynching are politically and theoretically

82. West, Cornel. *Prophecy Deliverance: A Revolutionary. Afro-American* (20th Anniversary Edition). ed. New York: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

83. Cone, James. *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare*. New York: Orbis Books, 1990.

84. Cone, James H... *The cross and the lynching tree*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011.

meaningful as they are primarily about the spectacle.⁸⁵ The fact that folks would have lynching parties after church is a sin, so to speak, and that this nation has not dealt with it.

Because of reading Cone, I also came to be familiar with a type of standpoint epistemology tied to my subjective experience. After all, Cone is the man who is credited with asserting that the God of the slave and the God of the slave master cannot be the same God. This seed would germinate and foster in me my “theory of Martians.” What I mean here is that through Cone, I would later read Thomas Nagel’s “What It’s Like to Be a Bat.”⁸⁶ Nagel shows that we really cannot ever know what it is like to be the other even if we were by some strange twist of fate transformed into that other. But in some ways, Lil Wayne says it even better when he states, “We are not the same; I am a Martian.”⁸⁷

What I mean here is that I generally think that the lived experience of Black Folks in the United States of America is so different from White brothers and sisters that in many cases one might as well be talking to a Martian. It has always amazed me the very real differences in subjective experiences between my experience of America and White brothers’ and sisters’ experiences. And to a certain extent, even the non-Black immigrant experience does not really approximate it either.

Good Doctor: So it sounds like Cone made you think that you could be a proud Black Person and still hold to your Christianity?

Melvin: That’s right. I realized that I had been a part of this proud and heroic lineage. We know that both Christianity and Islam both had been used as tools for Black degradation and exploitation. But I could use them differently.

85. Montgomery, Robert. “Spectacle of the Lynching of Claude Neal.” Tampa Bay Times, October 20, 2011, online edition.

86. Nagel, Thomas. “What It’s Like to Be a Bat,” *The Philosophical Review* 83, (): 435-450.

87. Carter, Dwayne. “The Carter REC. . .” Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tha_Carter_III (accessed April 28, 2014).

Good Doctor: It seems curious to me that you don't mention Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. or W.E.B. Dubois as well read as you seemed to be at such a young age. Why did they not play key roles in your development?

Melvin: Well of course I was familiar with both their works. I had read *The Souls of Black Folk*⁸⁸ several times, and I vividly remember thinking that this man was really bright. This might sound off in light of how important Dubois' notion of "double consciousness"⁸⁹ has become to Africana Philosophy. But I always remember thinking, what is he talking about, "Two Warring Souls?" For me even then, I knew that a Black Person should not be trying to reconcile being Black and being American. I know now that this was part of my encounter with Philosophy. I am sure will get to this later. I have always been a certain type of person.

I have really never thought about reconciling being Black with being American. Being an American as such has never been very high on my list of intellectual priorities. I guess that I always knew that I could never be the president. My social circumstances told me so. This is part of the reason why President Obama is interesting to me. What must it have been like to grow up with a White mother who told you could be anything you wanted to be? Now we know Black parents do this as well. They tell kids they can be whatever they want to be. But by and large, I do not think they believe it. My mom and dad are from Osceola, Arkansas; they knew better. In a similar vein, I was always skeptical, or rather critical, of Dr. King. I have found now that I am older I understand that Dr. King is frozen by and large as the Dreamer. I did not know as a teen/pre-teen that at the time of his death, Dr. King was at the nadir of his popularity. To be rather crude, I have always had a contrary disposition, but not out of a middle class entitlement

88. Dubois, W.E.B... *The Souls of Black Folk*. Chicago: AG, Mclurg & Company, 1903.

89. Allen Jr, Ernst, and Lewis R. Gordon. "On the Reading of Riddles: Rethinking DuBoisian Double Consciousness from Existence," *In Existence in Black: an anthology of Black existential philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

or being contrary for the simple reason of being so. I just knew that Dr. King could not be all he was made to be, as White folks loved him. At that time in life, I was always angry.

Good Doctor: Well that was an interesting viewpoint. I am sure we come back to elements of it later. I would like to move on for now. Can you speak about where you went to school?

Melvin: As I said before, my elementary was Sheridan Elementary, then I went to Bloomington Junior High School, and then my life got rather interesting. I say this because I was ward of the court starting in eighth grade. My mother terminated her parental rights as my guardian; I could no longer be silent about my mother's abuse, and my father was starting to sell dope from our apartment. Therefore, I went to five high schools in Illinois and one in Arkansas. I finally dropped out of high school after getting expelled. I had made a name for myself as an athlete as I had lettered in football and basketball. So my Amateur Athletic Union coach arranged for me to go to a junior college.

My choices were either Illinois Central College or Springfield College in Illinois. Though I was much better at football and realistically could have been a pro as a guard or tackle, I played basketball and chose Springfield College in Illinois because two childhood friends had agreed to attend this private Jesuit Liberal Arts Junior College. At SCI (as Springfield College in Illinois is known), I took several Philosophy courses and I was smitten with the study of Socrates. Now here was a man I could admire. He was committed to wholeheartedly being different. He rarely bathed, never wrote down anything of his own, and he lived to constantly trouble the waters of Athenian society. I was later to learn that Socrates had rich benefactors who supported him. I also would learn later that much of Athens was a slave society. You know it was great to think about what form of government was best, but Athens did not really live up to its lofty rhetoric.

And let us be clear here, Plato has strict categories of people. I could never embrace that. You know my criticality was beginning to kick in and I was like, “What do those people of the lower strata have in common with my Arkansas ancestors?” I know that there was a connection between Plato’s theory of forms and the Antebellum South.⁹⁰ Both societies were geared to folks knowing their place in the social hierarchy. And even growing up, my parents were always chastising me about staying in my place; my other siblings always got the benefit of me getting into trouble. My dad would always tell my mother, “Stay in a woman’s place.” She would then tell us to “stay in a child’s place.” After going to SCI, I transferred to the University of Illinois at Springfield.

Good Doctor: At UIS (University of Illinois at Springfield), you switched from Philosophy to Political Science. Why was that?

Melvin: I have always found the law rather interesting. Since Political Science seemed like the major a person majors in, if they want to go to law school, I took this as my field of study. You know, being at school in the capital of one’s state is awesome if one wanted to be lobbyist, which is what I thought I wanted to be—a state lobbyist. After unfairly losing an election for class president, I realized that I was not in the right racket, as it were. But I stayed in Political Science because I met Robert Sipe.

Good Doctor: Who was Robert Sipe? How was he vital to you?

Melvin: He was a professor of Politics who taught all the political Philosophy and theory courses. He also had specialties in Labor Studies, as he was a holdover from the days when UIS was Sangamon State University. As hard as it was to believe, it was a Left-leaning public liberal arts college. Dr. Sipe had long hair and a big beard; he smoked a pipe and wore suit jackets with

90. Wiedemann, Thomas E. J... Greek and Roman slavery. London: Routledge, 1981.

jeans. He was a 60s styled, unabashed Marxist and really argued hard for those class-centric ideas. He even let me take upper level graduate courses as an undergraduate.

I remember one particular class in which he would reconvene at a bar. He then would pull his pipe out of his jacket, load a bowl of Balkan Sobbrane Luxury Mixture #9 (considered by many to be the best pipe tobacco of all time), order a glass of Beefeater straight, pound it (drink it quickly), and order another. Now, he was getting drunk; he was getting nicely lubricated, as the saying goes. Back then I did not drink, as I thought it reflected poorly on one's ability to witness to others. When I think back, I know now that this is where I fell head over heels for Philosophy, in a dark bar right off campus, where Dr. Sipe really pushed my thinking. He knew I wanted to go to law school and he would tell me, "Don't you think the world has enough lawyers, Melvin?" I think he knew even before I did that I really had a knack for Philosophy, particularly Political and Social Philosophy. Dr. Sipe always told us that Political Philosophy is the least abstract and most concrete Philosophy as it was designed to make us think about how to make the world a better place. And you know that was very compelling to me being able to know that this thinking I was doing could possibly make the world better.

That was huge for me coming out of the Black Church. Making the world better is instilled in you; at least it was for me. I had the feeling that I was always haunted by the specter of Dr. King and Malcolm X. They loomed large for me then and still do to this day. In some ways, the fact that I am still alive means that I have not had the impact of the folks who I adore. If one is a threat to destabilizing the system, the power brokers will assure that you will be put in your place. Dr. Sipe was a key example in that he wanted to think globally about subordination. He also wanted me to think about my life—how I would lead it if I did not get my top knocked off (martyred).

Dr. Sipe told me that doing Philosophy and being an academic would offer a good life, but one would not become rich. That struck a resonant core with me as I have always had an alternative vision of the good life, which might surprise some, as I like good cigars and cognac a lot more than I should. But for me it is not the status of these purists. I love the social aspect of cigars, cognac, scotch, and most of all, bourbon. You know we philosophers love conversation. Open a bottle of nicely aged bourbon amongst a group of folks and conversation will ensue. I also like bourbon as I remember hearing that it was James Baldwin's favorite drink. That is in part the thing I loved most about Robert since he encouraged us to see Philosophy as more than a certain set of thinkers on a certain set of texts. Though he was not religious, he helped me in seeing that my religious faith could make a valuable contribution to my Philosophy. I could be a Christian and a philosopher and one would not necessarily invalidate the other.

Good Doctor: How so?

Melvin: Well, I remember when Dr. Sipe introduced us to Hegel. Many of my classmates were confounded by Hegel's dialectics.⁹¹ You know his formulation that history is moved by great men who are thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. I had the trinity with me: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus the God/Man), and God the Holy Spirit. Now I know that Hegel probably was not a believer and he simply used Christianity as a guise for his Philosophy.⁹² Then by doing later reading I would learn that both Dr. King⁹³ and Malcolm X⁹⁴ were very avid Hegel readers. Additionally, my being an idealist is rooted in my faith tradition. Now in general parlance,

91. Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, and Robert S. Hartman. Reason in history: a general introduction to the philosophy of history. New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1953.

92. Solomon, Robert C. "The Secret of Hegel: Kierkegaard's." In From Hegel to existentialism, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

93. Garrow, David. "The Intellectual Development of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Influences and Commentaries." Union Seminary Quarterly Review 40(1968): 437-452. Union Seminary Quarterly Review 40(1968) (): 437-452.

94. Marable, Manning. Malcolm X: a life of reinvention. New York: Viking, 2011

people take idealism to be some form of naiveté. As an idealist, it is not that we profess that the material is made manifested by the ideological.

My Black body faces material consequences from that which is ideological. Growing up in the church gives one a criticality if one is open to it. I have always been critical of folks who do not think that it is more than meets the eye as it pertains to institutions. Robert would always say, “Melvin, Marx has the answers,” with almost religious zeal. Because of him, I became familiar with the work of the Frankfurt School. The work of the Frankfurt School changed me forever. I was particularly drawn to work of Herbert Marcuse. I found his take on culture to be simply fascinating. I really felt intellectually seduced by Marcuse. He spoke to me in such a very profound way. I have literally never been the same since I read “Failure of the New Left?”⁹⁵ And “Murder Is Not a Political Weapon”⁹⁶ evoked new emotions in me.

I nearly felt the spirit move in me. I felt a kindred spirit with this group of Jewish émigrés who fled the Nazi Regime. As I read the works of other Frankfurt School thinkers, I was very bothered by what I perceived as their chief failure. I felt that most of the members had an insufficient analysis with respect to race.

One thing that I must state here is that the Frankfurt school project is still very powerful by conjoining Freudian psychological insight with Hegelian-Marxism. It gives a powerful explanatory tool about advanced industrial societies. For example, I have a friend who worked for a Non-Governmental Organization in the Dominican Republic and we would fight over

95. Marcuse, Herbert. “Failure of the New Left?” *New German Critique* 18(1970) (): 3-11. In this text Marcuse sets out the task of defining who do those individuals comprise the so-called New Left? He then sets out to define if this new conglomerate is a social and political project. (It is in this elaboration and definition that he raises the question if the New Left has failed.) As he asks rhetorically, “who then is the New Left,” he defines the New Left as consisting of the “political out-group’s that are generally thought to be to the left of traditional communist parties; these parties do not yet possess any new organizational forms, are isolated and without any mass base.” The isolation of the New Left is particularly pronounced here in the United States.

96. Marcuse, Herbert “Murder Is Not a Political Weapon,” *New German Critique* 12 (1977): 7-8.

poverty. She would always say, “Melvin, you know poverty is real in the Dominican Republic because folks are not worried about getting Nike Airs.” I think this spoke to the fact that that she had not been to Osceola, Arkansas. She had never seen the delta. Her analysis was rather bourgeois. I now know that she is the type who would help anyone if they asked. She is good people, but she could not understand why I found it curious that she needed to help folks in the DR more than folks on the south side of Chicago.

I always felt that she was missing the psychological dynamics of poverty in the United States. Being poor in the Dominican Republic and not having Nike Airs is not a rejection of the self as it is in the United States; after all, reification is real and the alienation that is caused from reification is very real.

Good Doctor: Can you speak to me more about this? What is it that you took away from these texts? What is your critique? The first article Marcuse sets the so-called feminine socialist project that he thinks would be revolutionary in that it would be the catalyst for freedom for both men and women alike. And the second article is very important in this heightened age of terrorism for the West.

Melvin: I am very much inclined to agree with Marcuse in part in “Failure of the New Left?” The women’s liberation movement could be a possible catalyst for a socialist transformation. However, I would contend that though Professor Marcuse astutely points out that the New Left is made up of so-called out groups, he never substantially forwards the possibility that the various communities of color may be the actual third force. In terms of the United States, I think one could very legitimately argue that the history of our country is one that is premised on White supremacy (White supremacy here is meant to denote both an ideological and material concept and system of operation.). The history of our country is replete with examples that

provide tremendous explanatory value as to how the otherness of communities of color operates in a way that extends capitalistic reach.

Part of Marcuse failing to properly address race in this limited construction (this failing is shared by numerous Marxists and neo-Marxists alike) is, in my mind, a critical error, one that I believe to be based on a correct premise about the capitalist system generally and particularly here in the United States. The assumption I am speaking of posits that communities of color are not distinct classes unto themselves. I particularly do not affirm the proposition, which some thinkers forward, that by and large so-called identity politics can be all too easily manipulated by the dominators of a given society. At the risk of being redundant, I am generally inclined to affirm this sentiment; however, it is my contention that those who forward this argument fall prey all too often to a very perverse historical shortsightedness generally caused by being economically reductionist.

For example, the history of the organized labor movement in the United States has numerous examples of the racial irrationality of capitalism. It is presumed the capitalist system is based on the idea of profit maximization. Why then were labor unions so ready to bar Blacks from their membership and manufacturing companies so eager to exclude Blacks from the labor force, even though they would have worked for considerably less than a comparably situated White worker? (The concept of Blacks being the last hired and first fired is ubiquitous for a reason.) Consider also the telling example of the women's suffrage movement, which at one time was once closely allied with the Black liberation movement of the late 1800s and early 1900s. This movement's leaders, namely Susan B. Anthony and Caddie Stanton, fell victim to advocating for the right of White women to vote by arguing that they were far more deserving of suffrage than, say, Black Men. Stanton and Anthony both affirmed their Whiteness as proof of

this. And, of course, this debate between Black Men and White women by and large was absent any consideration of women of color.) To put it rather crudely, I contend that Marcuse falls prey to economic reduction that subsumes race to the detriment of the socialist movement.

Good Doctor: Can you explain to me about revolutionary morality—how has the work of Marcuse been insightful here? Talk more about “Murder Is Not a Political Weapon.”

Melvin: In this very short but insightful text, Professor Marcuse begins by asking two questions for consideration. First, he ask us to consider if the actions of terrorist groups in Europe or in the United States aid in the general overthrow and/or weakening of the capitalistic system. He secondly asks if the actions of so-called terrorists be justified according to any standards of a revolutionary morality. He replies negatively on both accounts. To the first he asserts that even the elimination of even the most prominent individuals (for example, the President of the United States), no matter how powerful they are, will not undermine the normal functioning of capitalism in any way.

In addition to this, he further argues that actions, such as the previously mentioned, are in fact more likely than not to embolden the repressiveness of the state towards the groups; in some cases this might be the justification necessary to allow for dominant groups to go forward with enacting programs for their extermination. Professor Marcuse also poses the belief that even at the highest levels, the victims of terrorist attacks are only the representatives of the system. Here I would like to pose this idea in a more contemporary context. Consider, if you will, the terrorist attacks of 9-11. The two primary targets hit were the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. In my estimation, this is clearly an example of what Marcuse is talking about. I assert that insofar as we know, the terrorists did not engage the U.S. military per se, but rather attacked the Pentagon, which we know houses our Department of Defense; likewise, the terrorists could not compete

with the United States economically so they attacked a building that was known to have offices for nearly every major financial company in New York, such as Morgan Stanley.

This building also housed the United States Department of Customs and the United States Commodities Exchange. I am not attempting to conflate the ideas of terrorist religionist with the progressive views of those of us who would advocate a qualitatively different society through the move from capitalism to socialism. I am merely trying to show the validity that Marcuse's thought has even in a drastically different example of the struggle that I would advocate. This is so because, as Marcuse points out so insightfully, the attempt to bring about a socialist society which is influenced by the ideas of a Marxist is primarily guided by what he terms a revolutionary morality that should never be subsumed by the pragmatic needs of terrorism. It is to this end that we must say that no matter how noble the goal, we must never use ignoble actions to achieve it.

The struggle for freedom, to the extent that it is possible, must remain an open one, a struggle that never resorts to terrorist sneak attacks and conspiracy. With that being said, Marcuse does not fancy the victims of terrorism to be innocent victims, in that they are part of a system that does bring about alienation and estrangement to the vast majority of the world. The individuals who are responsible to a system of repression and oppression should rightfully be seen as agents of the system and are as such not innocent. To put it crudely, they may be only able to find absolution in a society that is socialist. It is my view that an article such as this provides tremendous explanatory value as to why the ideas of Marcuse still hold sway today, though he has been deceased for nearly 40 years.

His insightful analysis still remains relevant today. In fact, I would contend that his ideas are more relevant today even than when they first appeared, because they have moved from the

realm of mere postulation to grim verification. For example, who among us is not more cognizant of the possibility of terrorist attacks today than during the 1970s? We all now know that the enemy is firmly implanted amongst us. A legitimate question to ask is, is anyone innocent in our society? In a religious context, we used to talk about corporate sin.

Good Doctor: Why do you subscribe to CRT (Critical Race Theory)?

Melvin: Let me say it to you this way. I would like to say that I did not become acquainted with the corpus of literature that we call CRT until I was in graduate school. We must talk about CRT, though I would like to speak on that later. What struck me as problematic even then was an “epistemology of ignorance.”⁹⁷ How could these White fighters for justice miss the mark so badly on race? This was striking for me as other thinkers were not silent on it. Sartre certainly was not.⁹⁸ Marcuse in his post, one dimensional work, does speak to race, but I believe this is largely because Angela Davis, who Marcuse said was his best student, prodded him to do so. I will say that with respect to CRT, I believe that I am different particularly amongst my contemporaries in education as I came to CRT after I came to Critical Theory. In some ways, I think what Luscious Outlaw says is right; what we need is a Critical Theory of race as he poses in his must read text, *Critical Social Theory of Race in the Interest of Black Folks*.⁹⁹ Here I am not trying to be exclusive; what I think is that if you solve Black Folks problems, then the world is a better place. That is what a qualitatively different society looks like.

Good Doctor: It sounds like Dr. Sipe was very influential on you. Are you still close today?

97. Mills, Charles, Shannon Sullivan, and Nancy Tuana. “White Ignorance.” In *Race and epistemologies of ignorance*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.

98. Fanon, Frantz, and Jean Sartre. *The wretched of the earth*. New York: Grove Press, Inc.1963.

99. Outlaw, Lucius T. *Critical social theory in the interests of black folks*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

Melvin: I have the utmost adoration of Dr. Sipe, but one of the unfortunate personality quirks I have is that I like to put people on a pedestal above me. Maybe it is like my own sense of loathing and my own insecurities of feeling like I do not deserve to have positive relationships. It messed me up as a person who subscribes to a faith tradition that is based on human frailty and God's forgiveness. I can be really unforgiving. Have you ever seen the movie *Bad Company*?

Good Doctor: There are at least three films by that name. Which one are you referring to?

Melvin: I am thinking here of the 1995 film with Laurence Fishburne and Ellen Barkin as the lead actors. One of my favorite scenes in this film is when Mrs. Wells (Ellen Barkin) asks Mr. Crowe (Laurence Fishburne), "Do you know why I hate Grimes so?" Crowe forwards, "Because you owe him so much, your only choices are hate and being grateful and who wants to be grateful?"¹⁰⁰

Now I am actually grateful to a good number of people who have helped shape my mind. It is unfortunate my self-worth prohibits me in some respects from really having long-lasting relationships. It's Nietzsche's poem, "Stellar Friends." Much like my friendships with Mike Cernovich and Beth Gunzel, though I love them dearly and I owe a tremendous intellectual debt to them, I do not speak to them at all. I am always amazed that there are folks who have friends from when they were really young, as I have friends that I doubt I will speak to in five years. It is a long list for me: Beth Gunzel, Michael Cernovich, Tasha Love, Ronnie Pride, and Keonate Colman. In fact my best friends are folks I speak to about six or seven times a year. Cerno is from Kewanee, Illinois, a town near the Illinois/Iowa border. It has some acclaim because a very famous furniture store (Goods) is based there. Literally this town is so White, the only things

100. *Bad company*. VHS. Directed by Ross Thomas. S.L.: Touchstone Home Video, 1995.

Black in this town would be coffee and me. We met by taking a couple of classes together. We would engage in these no-holds-barred debates.

Cerno is a Libertarian, which I still to this day do not really understand. But somehow we started to hang out. We would work out and literally spend hours discussing Philosophy. A routine Friday for us would include working out from say, 4:30 to 7, and then going to Ryan's Buffet. They used to have a special \$8.99 for all you can eat steak and chicken. We would devour this buffet, and after eating we would go to the bookstore and peruse the latest books and periodicals. After the bookstore, we would head to the market to get groceries for the week or, if we had some money, we would go and get a cigar together. I learned a lot from brother Cerno. I think he taught me a lot about White privilege and the power that comes from being White.

Two things stick out for me. When we would go to through the aisles, Cerno would start grabbing stuff. If we were in the chip aisle, he would open a bag and start eating the chips. I mean really eating the chips as if he were at home. Then he would put the bag of chips in his cart as if nothing ever happened. Then we would go to the office supply section. We both became enamored with PhD grip pens by Papermate, which to us were really fine pens, though we both later went on to have several fountain pens, which I would lose. There is nothing like losing a Pelican fountain pen to make you stick to cheap ballpoints. But I digress. So, we were in the store and he would take the pen out of the wrapper, put the pen in his pocket. Now he had no intention of stealing the pens; he always paid for them.

He just never could understand my terror about this social convention. I knew that the moment I would have opened a bag of chips, Loss Prevention would certainly have stopped me. It really bothered me that after the fact, during our debriefing, I would never get him to see how

it was only because he was White that he could feel comfortable doing this. At the time, I had not yet read Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack."¹⁰¹

For me this was one of my first times feeling that the subjective positionality of White brothers and sisters was so different that you might sometimes be better off talking to a Martian. The other thing that I would like to say about how being White is really a form of "status property."¹⁰² Both of us grew up humbly, we both went to junior colleges, then UIS, but the White person has a way of sloughing off the markers of class background. In a way the person of color cannot, as the Black body is always significant. Now Cerno is a prosperous attorney. Perhaps the only thing that gives away his humble beginnings is that he has a brother who has been in jail for 20 years as a result of shooting his drug dealer and perhaps his orthodontic braces.

Good Doctor: Why do these things necessarily indicate a class marking for you?

Melvin: Well, I haven't done the in-depth studies, but I will say that braces are incredibly expensive. I would contend that most working class families cannot afford the \$5,000 for braces, much less families who had circumstances like mine. Literally every adult that I have ever met who has braces comes from a very humble background. Kids who come from families with means get their teeth fixed very early in life.

Good Doctor: After falling in love with Philosophy, tell me about your choice to study education; why did you choose to go to the University of Illinois?

Melvin: The first reason I went to Illinois is that I went to Illinois-Springfield, so part of my attraction to Illinois is that it is the big state university. If you live in California, you know

101. McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," *Peace and Freedom Magazine* (July/August 1989): 10-12.

102. "Harris, Cheryl. "Whiteness as Property." *Harvard Law Review* 106 (1993): (); 1707-1791.

you want to go to Berkeley or UCLA. If you grow up a Texan, and you get into UT Austin, your family is really proud of you. For one's parents, their co-workers will say, "You know such-and-such's son goes to Illinois and is getting his PhD. He turned out to be such a fine young man. She is so proud of him."

For me, you have to remember that I am the first person in my family to even look at a college, much less attend one. Also, having been a dropout with a GED, going to Illinois was not an option, but that is only part of it. I really became close to the late Terri Jackson. God rest her soul, she was the director of our Office of Minority Student Affairs. I was looking to find a local internship with a non-profit for the summer, as then I wanted to be a lobbyist. She asked me what my GPA was, and at the time I had a very high GPA, as I felt like I was coming into my own academically. She told me that I would be doing the Summer Research Opportunity Program (SROP).

I enjoyed it so much; I found out as much as I could about it. I found out the University of Chicago had a program and so did the University of California at Berkeley (though not affiliated with the CIC).¹⁰³ I thought about applying to another SROP program if I could. But my hopes of applying to another institution were squelched after consulting Mrs. Jackson. She was not having that. She said I could go to any SROP program so as long as I going to a SROP program at Illinois. In hindsight, I now realize that UIUC offered first-year funding for minority graduates of any of the other University of Illinois system schools. Mrs. Jackson was a woman who knew about power, and she was a most adept practitioner of power. You know Foucault

103. Committee on Institutional Cooperation. "The 'Committee on Institutional Cooperation.'" CIC. <http://www.cic.net/home>. (accessed April 28, 2014). collaborative efforts span the academic enterprise of its members, including (but not limited to): cooperative purchasing, course sharing, professional programs, library resources, information, study, diversity initiatives for students and faculty, faculty and staff networking, participant in Google Books. Library Project is the academic consortium of the universities in the Big Ten Conference. Current membership includes University of Chicago, University of Illinois–Urbana-Champaign, Indiana University, University of Iowa, University of Maryland–College Park, University of Michigan, Michigan State University, University of Minnesota, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Northwestern University, Ohio State University, Pennsylvania State University, Purdue University, Rutgers University, University of Wisconsin–Madison. For more information on CIC, see <http://www.cic.net/home>.

talks about how in order for power to be really effective, it must be constructive; it cannot be coercive.¹⁰⁴

Mrs. Jackson made it clear that though she wanted me to go to UIUC, she would support me if I wanted to go to elsewhere. At this time I had come back to what I felt was an intimate relationship with my faith. I applied to seminaries as I thought God was calling me to the ministry. So after undergraduate school, I was on my way to seminary, but Mrs. Jackson got me to attend SROP for my second term and I began to shift, as I was really in love with the graduate school type of life: staying up late, intellectual conversation, drinking drinks, and for the first time in my life, meeting women who liked me for being smart. You have to remember I started meeting the ladies from the Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and I got very familiar with folks from Spellman and Hampton. I had dear friends from Morehouse, North Carolina A&T, and Jackson State. We also had students from Puerto Rico and a couple from California.

Good Doctor: I see that SROP was huge for you. I would like to talk with you about that later, but I do not understand how someone with your interests would end up in a college of education for your PhD. Why not a Philosophy department, why not study political theory, political Philosophy, in the Political Science department?

Melvin: Well, that's an interesting question, certainly one that has caused me a lot of concerns over the years. But there are several reasons. When I was looking at political science departments, I was told outright that Big Ten universities generally have a quantitative analytical orientation, by which one must master statistical analysis to even do the most rudimentary game theory. A faculty member at Illinois told me, "Melvin, at Big Ten universities, we do not just

104. Karlberg, Michael. "The Power of Discourse and the Discourse of Power: Pursing Peace through Discourse Intervention," *International Journal of Peace Studies* 10 (1): 1-25.

look at numbers, we pulverize them.” My most difficult class at Illinois-Springfield was my Statistical Analysis course. Still to this day z-scores and multi-regression tables make me wince. But even if I was good at doing this type of work, I would not have done well, as I would have found it incredibly boring and too far removed. None of the graduate programs in politics I wanted to attend had a particularly heavy emphasis in political theory in general and we must remember I am heavily invested in the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School.

The one or two faculty members dedicated to Political Theory generally focus on Ancient Greece or Rome, and then you have the Medievalists and the Constructionists. Generally speaking, if you want to study the Frankfurt School, one’s choices are the Ivy League or upper tier University of California system schools. Amongst these, UC Santa Cruz was highly desired as Angela Davis was there. In the Midwest, no Political Sciences department has strength in the Frankfurt School. Now in terms of Philosophy departments, even though I was well read, to be honest, I was not really aware of Leonard Harris at Purdue or Charles Mills, who was at Illinois-Chicago and has recently moved to Northwestern.

But if I am honest with you, as life changing working with these folks would have been, I never substantively thought about going into an actual Philosophy department as they generally have two requirements to which I am very much opposed. The first is the GRE. I am opposed to all standardized testing, as we know it is a vestige of the psychometric movement.¹⁰⁵ We know with no doubt that these tests are inherently biased in terms of race, class, and gender. Standardized tests are barriers to entry in my estimation. The other factor that I feel was rather problematic was the fact that Philosophy departments require foreign languages as part of a program of study. Though one can learn the language during the course of the program, I

105. Lake, Marilyn, and Henry Reynolds. *Drawing the global colour line: White men's countries and the international challenge of racial equality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

contend that most of these programs do not really let folks know that it is not requisite to know the language before one comes to the program. Remember I have felt a complicated relationship with Philosophy in particular and education more generally. After all, I am from that place that is called the ghetto. I would ask myself, “What does that look like? How is a person who grew up where I did going to learn to speak French or German?” What is the utility of me being able to speak German? I have a cousin who will never get out of jail. The language requirements, I really do think, are repositories of Eurocentrism.

I think some might be alienated by it and find it to be a form of racial micro-aggressive behavior.¹⁰⁶ Some might think that to learn to speak a foreign language is tantamount to acting White.¹⁰⁷ I really do think Philosophy is such a racially coded endeavor. You have to be the right type of person to be seen as legitimately doing good philosophical scholarship. As I think about it now, I was very annoyed with the idea that I had to learn a foreign language, even though I knew that that my philosophical interest was moving toward English-speaking thinkers. I wanted to start to think about why Dubois or Baldwin were not considered philosophers. I mean, remember, William James talked W.E.B. Dubois out of pursuing Philosophy. They told him, “Don’t you have something better and more important to do than Philosophy?”¹⁰⁸

I felt like this statement was an affront to my background, my undergraduate reading, you know what I mean. You know Dr. Sipe would always tell me that, “Melvin, you know what the difference between you and a Yale student is that you ain’t got a rich daddy.” And of course he is right, in part. You know the rapper Jadakiss says something similar by saying that “I know a few

106. Solorzano, Daniel. “Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate.” *The Journal of Negro Education*, Education, Knocking at Freedom’s Door: Race, Equity 69 (2000): (): 60-73.

107. Freyer, Ronald. “Acting White “Education Next Issue Cover the social price paid by the best and brightest minority students.” *Education Next* Vol. 6. Though there are several sources that this notion of acting White theory derive from this insight was bought to my attention in a conversation with Dr. Ruby Mendenhall.

108. Yancy, “Lewis Gordon” 17 *Conversations*.

dudes doing life bids in jail and them way smarter than the White kids at Yale.”¹⁰⁹ Robert Sipe was very influential here for me, he helped me see and learn how to dissect and interpret the theoretical implications of institutions, particularly as it pertains to social prestige of elite social institutions. Institutions are laden with both implicit and explicit power relations.

Now as I mentioned, I came to be familiar with Education Policy Studies (as EPOL was known then) because the year I was applying to SROP, Political Science was not hosting students. So that is part of it, but I also was really impressed that my department had what seemed to me to be a lot of Black professors and I liked the idea that for once in my educational life, I could take several courses with Black professors in general and Black males, particularly. This is certainly a lesson for Philosophy, that having greater diversity in faculty hiring is very important if one wants to broaden the field. The racial role model argument¹¹⁰ is important; even though I have never worked closely with any of the Black professors that were part of my initial encounter with my graduate department save for Dr. Cameron McCarthy.

I would suggest that my interest in working with Dr. McCarthy was because I respect his scholarship so much. As I mentioned in the outset, one of my areas of interest is in cultural studies. This is because I have spent many years wrestling with the question posed by the Frankfurt School, which asks us to consider the extent to which the possibility of qualitatively different social order has become so obsolete that the last bastion for its realization is in the aesthetic dimension. This question has haunted me for some time now. Dr. Cameron McCarthy points out that, “One of the current difficulties in the educational literature on race relations is its refusal of the popular. American middle-class, White youth and adults get more of their social

109. Shaw., Eric. "We Thugs My Niggas," A Gangster and a Gentleman CD, <http://www.discogs.com/Styles-A-Gangster-And-A-Gentleman/release/2365974> (accessed January 1, 2014).

110. Anita Allen, "The Role Model Argument and Faculty Diversity," *The Journal of Higher Education* 1, no.1 (1995): 1.

construction of inner-city Blacks through the media—particularly, television and film—than through personal or classroom interaction or even in textbooks.”¹¹¹

The socio-cultural sphere, which I am defining as those non-structured spaces of social interaction amongst differing strata of class and race, is a tremendously important site of study for me for two reasons: First, it holds the potential for a radical re-imagination and enactment of the present dominant social order, and also, these non-structured spaces have the greatest likelihood of non-Black to Black social contact both domestically and abroad. One thing I would like to say here: The mentorship that I have received to the extent that I have been offered it and the extent to which I have been willing to accept it at all has come from folks older and far more established than am I. Consider, for example, Dr. Michael Peters, Dr. Norman Denzin, Professor Lou Turner, Professor Daria Roithmayr, and Dr. George Yancy, all of whom were well established in their career pursuits when I met them.

I think this was a key to us developing our relationships, as these folks were never threatened by me and, since they had already accomplished so much, they did not feel rushed for time as they mentored me. I imagine a newly minted or untenured professor is likely to be far less willing to devote time to students in this way. I am humbled that these folks have sincerely wanted me to become all that I can be, even if this means having work that potentially may critique their own. For example, Dr. George Yancy bears some mention here, as he mentored me through a potentially volatile situation. I spoke to Dr. Yancy after attending a provocative talk by

111. McCarthy, Cameron. "Living with Anxiety: Race and the Renarration of White Identity in Contemporary Popular Culture and Public Life." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* October 1998 vol. 22 (): 354-364.

Harvard University Philosopher and Black Studies Professor Tommie Shelby entitled “Liberalism, Self-Respect and the Cultural Aspects of Ghetto Poverty.”¹¹²

Though a well-attended and highly informative discussion, Professor Shelby’s message thoroughly troubled me as it was based by and large on the unstated premise that he believes White brothers and sisters have the ability to transcend their subjective racial positionality. For me the unintended consequences of Professor Shelby’s talk is that many good White brothers and sisters will think that to overcome the privileges that Whiteness and White supremacist ideology bestows on them, they need only to have the will to aid folks of color.

After perusing the Internet for some more talks of Professor Shelby’s, I discovered after several hours of searching and reading that his wife is a White American woman. I mentioned this to Dr. Yancy in passing and suggested that it makes sense to me why he holds out so fervently to the hope of White transcendence. I asserted, “I don’t think a Black man can be married to a White woman and not on some level believe in the power of education to allow them a sense of racial transcendence.” Dr. Yancy’s voice, I noticed, had raised several octaves when he asked me, “Melvin, do you have any White folks on your PhD committee?” I replied, “Yes, two of the four are White Men , Dr. Michael Peters and Dr. Norman Denzin.”

Dr. Yancy, in an act of generosity, began to show me the extent to which all Black Folks who wish to engage in this society positively to one degree or another have to enlist White help. All Black Folks generally and Black Men particularly have to believe in a certain type of transcendent quality of White brothers and sisters. In everyday parlance, all Black Folks need a “White cosigner.” Even the current president, Barrack Obama, as powerful as the seat he holds is, still has to have White allies whom he is far smarter than, assert his intelligence for him. I was

112. Shelby, Tommie. "Justice, Self-Respect and the Culture of Poverty." Lecture, CAS/MillerComm presentation from Center for Advanced Study, Urbana,

then asked, “Have you ever had a time when you had to have a White vouch for you?” In my own life, this phenomenon has played out. I am very much interested in Racialization as a global phenomenon, particularly what I view as widespread and growing anti-Black American sentimentality that I find rather pervasive when I travel.

For example, I was doing a talk for our department’s Global Studies in Education (GSE) monthly gathering, and during the question and answer period I asserted that part of the reason why GSE doesn’t get more native to the United States Blacks amongst its students is the extent to which by and large this unit caters to foreign-born students and White folks who have a fetish for that which is foreign born. Now when I said this, many of the professors and students in the room were shocked. It was only when Dr. Nicole Lamers (who is a White woman) said, “Melvin is right” that my claim became valid to the room. So in hindsight, I was thankful for Dr. Lamers cosigning my point. After thanking Dr. Yancy for his point, we parted ways.

I would argue that neither Dr. Shelby nor Dr. Yancy appears to want Whites to have to throw “they mommas” out with the bath water, but they would not hesitate to have White brothers and sisters to at least have the ability to call “they mommas” racist if necessary. The real conundrum, or so I fear, is that there is no separation between the two. For Whites, and their intractable Whiteness, to do one is to do the other. And as I have said before, the epistemic grid of most White brothers and sisters is so experientially different than Black folk and people of color, more generally, that Black might have more in common with a Martian than most White university students and some faculty.

One of the central themes that I found both powerful and well-argued in Yancy’s conversation was his claim that it is both academic and non-academic anti-racist Whites who are complicit in and contribute to the maintenance of White supremacy despite the fact that they may

even be very knowledgeable about critical Whiteness studies. Yancy points out the irony by saying, “And I agree, that Blacks have been talking about Whiteness for decades and it is only now that it is garnering legitimacy as White scholars are getting their feet wet in the study of Whiteness. There is something both suspicious and narcissistic about this.

After I began to search a little more about Dr. Yancy, I found that he also is married to a White woman. Dr. Yancy and I found, in an effort not to miss each other’s point, it wasn’t being married to a White woman that was the issue I cared about. It was that I took this to be proxy for another set of beliefs that I found problematic. I think Dr. Yancy knew my heart enough to point this out to me. I do not think he would have done this if he was not as established as he is and that he is older and was able to discern that I do not actually worship at the level of the epidermis; I worship at the level of the epistemological. For me this comment was very reminiscent of hearing Malcolm speak about Baldwin. It is Baldwin’s politics that are important. Dr. Yancy was getting me to that point and he did it constructively and not coercively.

But I do think your question is powerfully rich. Let me say that on several occasions I nearly left Educational Policy and Organizational Leadership because I was having difficulty reconciling how one finishes a program and writes a dissertation about schools, if one really does not care about schools in the way I think most of my counterparts care about them.

Good Doctor: What do you mean you really don’t care about schools? A person with your background, I would think, would find the educational system a great repository for exploration. Most high school dropouts do not go on to finish their PhD.

Melvin: Indeed, you are right. I mean, my complicated educational past does mean something here. I think what I really mean is that I do not have the same interest as most folks in colleges of education generally. I have never thought about being a teacher or a school

administrator. I know some folks who are former high school administrators who care about and are intrigued by questions about teaching efficacy—teacher’s motivations. I do not know if it was reading Baldwin at such a young age that shaped my view of schools. The rap group Dead Presidents’ song, “They Schools” is a favorite of mine. It says, “School is like a 12 step brainwash camp / They make you think if you drop out you ain’t got a chance / To advance in life, they try to make you pull your pants up / Students fight the teachers and get took away in handcuffs / And if that wasn’t enough, then they expel y’all / Your peoples understand it but to them, you a failure.”¹¹³

I went from student body president and National Honor Society member as a freshman to summarily being expelled because of a fight in which I never even threw a single punch. I will never forget what it was like to hear those sirens. Now imagine what it must have felt like to be my mother; she was picking up my brother and sisters and when she saw the police cars, she said she knew it was something that I had done. I am different, as I first fundamentally think that the American educational system is a success; it does what it was designed to do. It inoculates society with American Civil Religion, particularly with American Exceptionalism. Most Americans really believe that the United States is the greatest country ever in human history; this is despite the fact that most Americans will never leave this country’s shores. Additionally, the educational system replicates the racial and economic status quo. It is no surprise that those groups that have the lowest rates of educational attainment by and large are this society’s most debased. Here I am thinking of native-born Blacks and Latinos. To me, this is why Malcolm X is so profound. He said that it was really inevitable that he was going to prison despite having good

113. Dead Presidents, “They Schools,” C. Gavin, L. Alford, V. Williams, A. Mair Let’s Get Free, April 10th 2014 <http://www.elyrics.net/read/d/dead-prez-lyrics/they-schools-lyrics.html>.

grades in his youth. This parallels my experience. I went from National Honor Society to being a high school dropout.

Now here, I am not suggesting that we don't try to change the educational system, what I am saying is that many folks in education would not grant you my first assertion. By and large, I think most folks in education do not know about the rhetorical tapestry of race as it pertains to schools. I see so many parallels between education and the control of Black and brown bodies.

Let me stop here for a moment and ask you about the connection between schools and housing. Here's what I have been in so many arguments about, housing and say, gun control. For example, I was smoking a cigar with a White brother one time who was adamant that since he does not live in the safest neighborhood, he must own a gun to protect his family and his home. As we talked, it became clear to me that he has an idea that his lack of safety is directly linked to his inability to purchase safety in a so-called better neighborhood. This nebulous thing called safety is a class issue, but I asserted to this brother that society's elites want us to frame the issue this way. My concern is that is what everybody wants, feeling safe, is a human rights issue. Politicians are not really anxious to deal with a multi-racial coalition of folks marching to Washington, demanding access to that which politicians have.

In a similar vein, I do not think it is right that having higher property taxes means I have access to so-called "quality" education. I am a discourse thinker. Dr. Michael Peters and Professor Lou Turner put it beautifully by saying to me, "Melvin, you're not interested in the so-called Philosophy of Education . But what you are interested in is both Philosophy and education." So let us take the hot button issue of charter schooling. Now part of me straightforwardly argues that the charter movement is really the Right's attempt to privatize a

public good.¹¹⁴ Some would say to what it alleges to do. Now I do not think it is much of a stretch to assert the charter movement is proof positive that in politics strange bedfellows are made, as Bill Gates¹¹⁵ and single Black and Latino mothers want different things out of the movement.

I'm not interested in Teach for America's educational efficacy, but TFA does recruit a certain "kind"¹¹⁶ of teaching candidate, which is overwhelmingly the target of the charter movement. What I like to think about when we speak about education is discursive regimes; for example, No Child Left Behind. I would like to talk about what Derrida speaks to. Let us, in Philosophy of Education, ask what the pertinent questions are.¹¹⁷ For instance, is No Child Left Behind premised on a fundamentally anti-Black manner of thinking which allowed it to be both formulated and passed into law?¹¹⁸ Now let's go back and talk about Malcolm. His educational narrative speaks of being a mascot. The idea of a mascot and, in fact, it is one of the more exploited aspects of Malcolm's life. In many respects the very notion of being a mascot is very central to me as I have experienced being a mascot on several occasions, which I would like to elaborate on later.

Stefancic, Jean, and Richard Delgado. "No mercy: how conservative think tanks and foundations changed America's social agenda." Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996. The authors show that, since the sixties, the political and social Left has had little to do with setting the country's agenda and that conservative think tanks and foundations have been systematically inciting a conservative revolution by funding a variety of issue-oriented studies and programs. The authors focus on seven areas in which this battle has been waged and won by the powerful conservative coalition: English Only, Proposition 187 and immigration reform, IQ/race and eugenics, affirmative action, welfare, tort reform, and campus multiculturalism. See also "The Charter School Experiment: Expectations, Evidence, and Implications," *The Charter School Idea*, eds. Christopher Lubienski and Peter Weitzel (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

115. "States News Service, "Gates Foundation Invests Nearly \$25 Million in Seven Cities Dedicated to Bold Collaboration between Public Charter and Traditional Schools Competitive Grants Awarded to Seven "Compact" Communities." December 5, 2012.

116. Brown, Anthony L. "On Human Kinds and Role Models: A Critical Discussion about the African American Male Teacher." *Educational Studies*: 296-315.

117. Jacques Derrida, "What Comes before the Question," accessed April 10, 2014 <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jacques-derrida/videos/what-comes-before-the-question/>.

118. Wun, Connie. "The Anti-Black Order of No Child Left Behind: Using Lacanian psychoanalysis and critical race theory to examine NCLB." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 11: 1-13.

Good Doctor: What, in terms of interest and orientation, do you believe is different about you in contradiction to other so-called philosophers who are more senior?

Melvin: That is a question I have thought about a lot, particularly because in academy, one of ten has to think about this. What makes one thought or positionality different than what has come before them? In the academy, in particular graduate study programs, the faculty reward functionaries. I have noticed during my time in the academy that really smart folks can have difficulty if you aren't adopted. I remember during undergraduate studies, the department chair (Dr. Schwark) told us at our annual Pi Sigma Alpha banquet, this organization which is the National Honor Society of Political Science, that as a department, he and the other professors stated that as educators they really prided themselves on folks who went on to get PhDs far more than producing folks who would go on to law school. The academy is much like any other corporation and only wants to hire replicas and laud microcopies. If you become subservient to a mentor and parrot their usually centrist ideology, you will be lauded. I agree with Joy James when she asserts, "I think the academy has more hostility toward Left radicals than it does toward people of color."¹¹⁹ I think she is right, to a point; many of my problems are because I am a "Lefty" who is of color. Not one or the other, but both; the Black leftist. This is an odd duck in the academy, particularly in light of the rightward shift of the academy in the past 40 years politically. For example, it could be argued that the modern Leftists would have been slightly left of center in the 1960s. The presentation of the self¹²⁰ means more in the academy than other places, which one might have an inclination that this might not be the case. But I have seen it too many times.

119. James, Joy, and George Yancy. "Joy James." In *African-American philosophers: 17 conversations*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

120. Rosiek, Jerry, and Jerry Rosiek. "Professor as Embodied Racial Signifier: A Case Study of the Significance of Race in a University Classroom." *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 28 (2006). 395-409.

I recently read an article about the reemergence of the Black dandy.¹²¹ I mean I have a dear friend who got into trouble with his department and by trouble I mean this man ended up with a felony. But this man has managed to still solicit support from his department, who considers him a darling of sorts. I also know folks all over the academy who have been able to get in where I could not. Now after we understand how academic spaces really laud those who go along and may never really change the game. Now what distinguishes me from other Black philosophers is obviously my class background. If you take the magisterial text, *17 Conversations with African American Philosophers*,¹²² several of the contributors to this book were products of a military background; by that I mean they had parents who were active duty military people. I, on the other hand, have actually served in the military.

What makes my service particularly interesting is that I went during college. Having enough distance from this occurrence now, I know that most folks who want to question the world as I do would not go into the Army as I did. Although I was doing well in undergraduate school, I did not like the uncertainty of not having guarantees related to my education. The Army is a great place to find out about yourself, but it is not the ideal place to find yourself.

I have always felt a palpable discomfort about wanting to commit fully to Philosophy. Though I believe in academic divisions of labor, I am very suspicious of folks who are not linked to Leftist praxis. I have been for some time a member the Planner's Network and several other social justice groups. In fact, I have for some time now have been the only non-Planner in the group. I also have been a key contributor to the UR movement. These groups appeal to me, as they are the most engaged student groups on the campus of the University of Illinois. For me I

121. "Behrend, Wendy. "Black Dandies Fashion New Academic Identities." <http://chronicle.com/article/Black-Dandies-Fashion-New/135954/> (accessed May 6, 2014).

122. Yancy, George. "Philosophy Moving the Center." In *African-American philosophers: 17 conversations*, New York: Routledge, 1998.

would like to draw the distinction between Philosophy, capital P, as an academic pursuit situated in the university, and Philosophy as being a critically engaged position or stance based on overturning the status quo.

Here I think is where I depart from the platonic notion of the philosopher king. I think there are strong parallels we can make between philosopher and genius. For example, historically, until very recently, genius was thought to be an attribute of a person. Anyone might be said to possess a certain level of genius; but now instead of being a personal attribute, we say a particular person is a genius. Or for Black excellence, society modifies genius. We say LeBron James is a basketball genius or we say that Prince is a musical genius or say someone like Kanye West is a lyrical genius.

I think the notion of the philosopher and Philosophy has undergone a similar change. Particularly in the academy, we today say that a person is a philosopher. By this we are talking about a “kind” of person, not that this person has philosophical attributes. For me, I think of Philosophy as an attribute of a person. I think Lewis Gordon is right to say that there are “Philosophical Oriented” Individuals. In my mind I consider Dubois to be a genius as he expedited that attribute in his life. In a similar vein I also believe him to be a philosopher as he exhibits that attribute. That is why Baldwin and Richard Wright¹²³ are also philosophers to me—their work speaks in very concrete terms about philosophical issues.

I’m a post-civil rights thinker, in that so many of my experiences have been shaped by being the progeny of those Blacks who left the South for better opportunity; but the second wave didn’t find the success for themselves or their families that those early migrants found. In some ways, I am distinguished from other philosophers as I am an opportunity thinker. I simply did not

123. Walker, Margaret. Richard Wright Demonic Genius. New York: Harper Paperbacks, 2000.

and have not had opportunities in the same way others have had. Also, I grew up in rural Arkansas, then Bloomington, Illinois. I have always wondered how different my life would have been had my family made it to Chicago. There are no Deval Patrick's¹²⁴ coming from my neighborhood. Small town poverty is different than, say, growing up in Chicago. Though I was spared from some of the dangers of growing up in a large urban area, I also did not have the opportunities that these spaces offer. Sometimes the simple circumstances of being born in a major metropolitan area can provide opportunities that are unavailable to one from a small town. Deval Patrick, the current governor of Massachusetts and only the second Black governor in US history, grew up in the notorious Robert Taylor homes, at one time the biggest housing project in the United States.¹²⁵

Though he grew up in those circumstances, he was able to impress a Black teacher who suggested he apply for the "A Better Chance" program¹²⁶ which provided him a scholarship to the prestigious Milton Academy,¹²⁷ a boarding school that is a feeder to Harvard University. From what I understand, this opportunity was only available to him because he lived in inner city Chicago. He made the most of his opportunity by attending Harvard for both his undergraduate and law degrees, where he was a law school classmate of President Obama and Harper Hill. My point is only that we usually speak of Deval Patrick as a tremendous success, and he is one. But why do we not realize that a key component of that success is based largely on happenstance? And I think that is true for most successful people. He left Chicago for Milton in eighth grade and was born in a time that was more institutionally open than when I came of age. You know,

124. "Wikipedia. Deval Patrick." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deval_Patrick. (Accessed May 6, 2014).

125. "Wikipedia. "Robert Taylor Homes." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Taylor_Homes (accessed May 6, 2014).

126. *A Better Chance*. "A Better Chance," <http://www.abetterchance.org/abetterchance.aspx?pgID=967>. (Accessed May 6, 2014).

127. "Wikipedia, "Milton Academy," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milton_Academy. (Accessed May 6, 2014).

the first president I remember is Ronald Reagan, whom I despise. I fundamentally do not believe, like many philosophers do, in high versus low cultural distinctions. This might also make me a bit different, as one of the chief criticisms of the Frankfurt School is that they have high/low distinctions.

I am the type of thinker who in a conversation will talk about Bruce Lee, Plato, and Tupac Shakur all in the same hour. I do not vote, and though I personally think President Obama is the best person to primarily occupy the White House, he still is, to my mind, irrefutably a Black capitalist. In my view, if you are the President of the United States, you are still the agent of the Devil. The structure and nature of this behemoth, this Leviathan, is always bigger than the sum of its parts. Other characteristics make me unique, Secondly, I am one who is opposed to “epistemic convergence.” Thirdly, I believe I am far more concerned with cultural studies, particularly sports, than are most Black philosophers, which I also feel is a class hierarchal issue. In fact, many folks are surprised to find out that I’m into sports.

Good Doctor: Let us talk here about Critical Race Philosophy or applying Critical Race Theory to Philosophy.

Melvin: In terms of CRT, we have to speak about the first tenet of Critical Race Theory. The primary tenet of CRT is that racism and White supremacy are not aberrational and are necessary and constructive parts of the dominant culture of the United States. I think in the modern race being done that I like; I mean really like, but that does not make this work Critical Race Theory. In my view this insight does a lot of work for us as adherents of CRT. As we start from the position that all institutions and the ideologies that undergird those institutions are necessarily repositories of racial subordination. When we, as CRT devotees, speak of racial subordination White supremacy, we do not mean our concern with rationality. We mean we are

concerned with social political systems. It is very interesting to me that CRT has only recently been thought as key to our understanding of Philosophy.

This, to my mind, is a bit counterintuitive. Scholars of color and sympathetic White brothers and sisters have said that, with respect to race, the legal, educational, and housing systems are all disproportionately unfair and complicit with the subordination of Blacks. Now I would say it is a “duh” moment to say that we should apply the CRT insights to that which supports those systems we are exploring: Western Philosophy. White supremacy is fundamental to the maintenance of the status quo. Here let me state that Apostle Paul might best sum up what I’m saying when he states, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”¹²⁸ I do not worship at the level of the epidermis; I worship at the epistemological level.

No specific human is the object of my struggle. I hate White supremacy wherever its manifest. That is one of those profound insights that Fanon provides us in *Black Skin White Masks*.¹²⁹ What I am battling against is actually in me. So, no White person is my enemy. Ideological and structural White supremacy is. What CRT does for me is that it allows me to have a certain freedom. I am not a sociologist, though I draw heavily from sociological theory.

As a philosopher, one thing I would like to eventually accomplish is to be able to make a contribution like Derrick Bell. Now I don’t know if I will be the father of an intellectual movement. One of the key contributions Bell made was his notion of “Interest Convergence” in his seminal piece, “Brown vs. The Board of Education and the Interest Convergence

128. "Ephesians 6:12..." In Holy Bible: African American Jubilee edition: King James Version. Jubilee Ed. New York: American Bible Society, 1999.

129 Fanon, “Black Skin”

Dilemma.”¹³⁰ He laid out a theoretical framework which legal historian Mary Dudiziak later verifies in her famous “Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative.”¹³¹ Through archival research, she shows that that Bell’s notion of interest convergence was in fact true as it realizes to the famous Brown case. Now my point about epistemic convergence is largely a product of the work of the 1960s intellectuals. The Black philosophers who came during the 1960s and 1970s felt that they had to justify their presence by trying to garner the respect of the old guard establishment. They would give the philosophical justification for their thought by saying that their thought was really like the thoughts of Whites.

To some degree this is still a very profound force in Black Philosophy. I have personally reviewed an article that argued that Carter G. Woodson made a great contribution to the Philosophy of Education . I agree with the author’s assertion, but not how he goes about it. The author’s chief notion was that Carter G. Woodson’s work might be favorably compared with Jon Dewey. That’s what epistemic convergence is, really, with respect to race. “This tool functions to make Fanon the Black Sartre or Husserl. Dubois is read as the Black Hegel, James or Dewey.”¹³² This would be one of the biggest failings of the older thinkers. I don’t want to dismiss Dewey, but Carter G. Woodson wrote *The History of the Negro Church*¹³³ and *The Mis-education of the Negro*.¹³⁴ He is the founder of Black History Month. The importance of his contribution does not need to be legitimized through Dewey. A White thinker’s philosophical ice is not necessarily colder to me.

¹³⁰ Bell, Derrick. "Brown vs. The Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma." *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 93, 1980 (1980): 518-33.

¹³¹ Dudiziak, Mary. "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative." *Stanford Law Review* 61: pp. 61-120.

¹³² Tommy, Curry, "On Derelict and Method: The Methodological Crisis of African-American Philosophy’s Study of African-Descended Peoples under an Integrationist Milieu," *Radical Philosophy Review* 14, 139–164.

¹³³ Woodson, Carter Godwin. *The history of the Negro church*. Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1921.

¹³⁴ Woodson, Carter Godwin. *The mis-education of the Negro*. New York: Tribeca Books, 2013.

I will give you a very personal example of what I mean. Let's take the luminary Angela Davis. For example, I think Angela Davis is the ultimate example of an engaged scholar. I particularly love her current emphasis on destroying the prison industrial complex. But if I am honest with you, when I was younger, say in my undergraduate days, I had a form of epistemic convergence in me. I did not really delve into the work of Angela Davis until I watched a video with Herbert Marcuse, where he asserted that Davis was his best student. I am now ashamed to admit that almost instantly I reconsidered her as a thinker. I had quarantined her contribution to the social fighter; I did not know this Black Panther and member of Communist US party was such a deep thinker. In so many ways, Baldwin spoke words that even in this so called "post racial epoch" ring true, when he postulated that, "The American triumph—in which the American tragedy has always been implicit was to make Black people despise themselves. When I was little, I despised myself. I didn't know any better and this meant albeit unconsciously or against my will or in great pain that I also despised my father and my mother and my brother and sisters."¹³⁵

I do not think I would have come to know Angela Davis if I did not respect Marcuse so much. In a very real sense I valued her direct lineage to the Frankfurt School, more than her contributions in the Black freedom struggle. The inferiority complex that Baldwin spoke about is still very real, in that many Black philosophers feel the tendency to defer Black thought through the European and Anglo philosophical ophthalmology. For example, the work of Cornel West is probably the most influential Black thinker of this epoch. But two of his more important pieces, I would contend, in effect unwittingly attempt to further the degradation and debasement of Black philosophical inquiry.

135. Baldwin, James, and Randall Kenan. *The cross of redemption: uncollected writings*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2010.

Here I am thinking of two works in particular: his contribution to the foundational Black Studies text entitled, *Black Theology and Marxist Thought*¹³⁶ and his “Philosophy and the Afro-American Experience.”¹³⁷ In the former text West sets out to demonstrate the extent to which Black theology and Marxism might be reconciled to each other. Though I applaud the effort and attention paid to this project. I am stuck in a real sense by a feeling of dissonance, as the real point of this article is to appeal to secular White Marxist to take Black Theologians seriously. In the latter text, West seeks to elucidate the salient philosophical traditions inherent in the Black intellectual tradition by comparing this tradition with the insights bequeathed us by Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and John Dewey. Again I respect the attempt and to be fair to West, he does say that any conception of Black Philosophy we could extricate from these giants is left extremely wanting.

My chief problem with this attempt is that it privileges the thought of Dewey, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein absent an explicit acknowledgement of the power relations at play that make it a necessary condition to evoke these thinkers. My point here: Is it possible to conceptualize a Black Philosophy absent invoking White thinkers? Can, in this current epoch, a thinker ask about the philosophical contributions of we who are, Black, absent having to first bow down to a White thinker?

Now I am moving towards a Philosophy of Black sport. I am not audacious enough to say I am the only relatively young Black philosopher who takes the sporting dimension seriously, but it seems that I am. OR you could also say “I don’t think most Black philosophers, save for a few, and pay sufficient or substantive attention to sports. I really do think in some regard this failure

136. West, Cornel. *Black theology and Marxist thought*. New York: Theology in the Americas, 1979.

137. Cornel West, “*Philosophy and the Afro-American Experience*,” in *A Companion to African-American Philosophy*, eds. Tommy Lott and John Pitman, (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

bespeaks to the precarious nature of Black philosophers' self-construction. Perhaps this speaks to a feeling that sport is not really worthy of sustained philosophical analysis, particularly as it pertains to modern athletes. Cornel West, to my knowledge, has once written about a Black athlete, his piece on Jackie Robinson. Many Black philosophers will venture into the philosophical treatment of music and film. Perhaps sport is important to me in a different way, as I went to college on a basketball scholarship.

Black Americans make up roughly 13% of the population of the United States, and I would contend that a large part of the populace might have their most sustained and positive contacts with Blacks through the realm of sport. I certainly contend that the most globally known Black American images are of those of Black athletes. For me, I have always held that those attributes that make LeBron James a marvel to watch on the court, if applied to other endeavors, would make anyone supremely successful given the right circumstances in a non-athletic endeavor. I would ask other thinkers, how important is racial representation to you, yet you remain silent on sports? Blacks in general, and Black males particularly, are lauded for characteristics displayed on the athletic arena in ways that would be vilified in other walks of life. The sports arena is one the very few in our society where Black excellence is lauded by the wider society. If I said that W.E.B. Dubois is the academic LeBron James, would Black philosophers or the larger academics take me seriously? LeBron James is lauded as the greatest basketball player on Earth because he is so versatile. He is adept at scoring, rebounding, defending, and passing, as Dubois was in Philosophy, history, and sociology. I would also say that if for nothing else, this analogy is useful, as both of these men's greatness is not really

understood in their areas of endeavor. LeBron James is an interesting figure. Consider his now infamous “decision.”¹³⁸

Despite giving all the proceeds raised from this event to charity, LeBron was lambasted by folks for not remaining in Cleveland. No Black philosopher spoke about why the image of a young Black man to the extent he could control his labor infuriated folks so. Now remember realistically, even in free agency, he could have only gone to six teams. This man turned down in excess of thirty million dollars to go to Miami. I know several professors who have turned jobs down, making 50% more because it was not a desirable location. Does it not speak to something in the core of the social psyche? Great wealth is created through this system of voyeurism. Now of course, athletes are paid tremendously well, but remember that to own a sports franchise, you must by and large be a billionaire.

Now I do not take lightly the invoking of the institution of slavery, but I find it striking that works like William Rhoden’s *The Forty Million Dollar Slave*¹³⁹ or Irving Pryor’s *The Slave Side of Sunday*¹⁴⁰ hasn’t warranted more engagement by Black philosophers. Though this experience seems like eons ago, I once served as a lead tutor and monitor for the football team at Illinois. On one night, as we were discussing pro sports, several football players and I began speaking about the NFL Scouting Combine. I asked the student-athletes if they had ever seen the physical examination given at the NFL Combine; instantly we all paused.

This is so because I would contend that one cannot see this occurrence as a Black Person and not think about the slave auction block; the image of seeing nearly nude Black Men being poked and prodded. To see White Men look at the naked Black form from all angles and then

138. “The Decision,” *Wikipedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Decision_\(TV_special\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Decision_(TV_special)).

139. Rhoden, William C. *\$40 million slaves: the rise, fall, and redemption of the Black athlete*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2006.

140. Prior, Anthony E. *The slave side of Sunday*. S.I.: Stone Hold Books.com, 2006.

literally open and examine someone's eyes. Seeing the NFL Combine, one necessarily is drawn to think of the slave block. They give humans an examination as if they were chattel. No Black philosopher has sought to speak about Mike Vick, Barry Bonds, and the Williams sisters. I mean, think about Serena. She won an Olympic gold medal and started performing the Crip walk.

The sports arena is a repository of symbolic racial interactions. Stuart Hall is right when he wisely asserted that the obviousness of phenomena sometimes renders it less intelligible.¹⁴¹ Boxing as a sport is at its nadir of popularity amongst Whites. No Black philosopher has spoken to the drastic wane in boxing's popularity. I have always had a striking suspicion that White ethnic groups' assimilation here in America has had something to do with this. I am not saying that boxing doesn't have its White followers. I mean the heavyweight champions are products of the former Soviet Union.¹⁴² My thought process is this whiting project requires the ethnic White immigrant to leave that behind. The historian David Roediger points out that the gradual process of an Italian immigrants becoming White necessarily entailed leaving the ways of the old country behind for the specter of an increased Whiteness of the United States.¹⁴³ The vast majority of boxing participants and viewers are Black and Latino. But as recently as 1990, a new

141. "Hall, Stuart. Race The Floating Signifier." http://www.mediaed.org/assets/products/407/transcript_407.pdf (accessed May 10, 2014).

142. At the time of this correspondence The Klitschko brothers, Vitali and Vladimir, hold all five major titles in the heavyweight division. They are the first brothers to hold versions of the heavyweight championship at the same time.

143. Roediger, David R. *Working toward Whiteness: how America's immigrants became White: the strange journey from Ellis Island to the suburbs*. New York: Basic Books, 2005.

In this text Professor Roediger argues that White ethnic minorities faced harsh discrimination and intense societal suspicion from more established White populations. With this in mind, he rejects any notion that so called ethnic were offered full-fledged White status immediately on arrival to the shores of United States from Italy, Hungary, Ireland, Poland and Germany. Professor Roediger documents assertions to both historical record and deconstructive theoretical analysis. To his credit, Professor Roediger passionately points out ways that go ethnic White space to oral treatment in an effort for social inclusion their treatment pales in comparison to that it was suffered by African Americans. Texas is life and going up numerous examples of how part and parcel of the ethnic White socialization process was to join and all-American pastime of being discriminatory with a large majority against African-Americans. And Rutgers' assertion is far more accurate historically than say Ian F. Haney Lopez's *The Social Construction of Race: Some Observations on Illusion, Fabrication, and Choice* which uses a form of ethnicity theory which is in my estimation a bit ahistorical in that it conflates the experiences of particular groups for the sake of generalizability.

manifestation of boxing has come to the forefront, called “white collar boxing.”¹⁴⁴ These groups invert boxing’s current demographics, as participants in this enterprise are generally all White and affluent. Sport has always been highly racialized, and I contend this should be a site for study by Black philosophers.

Good Doctor: What do you think a Black American like yourself, or the larger Black community, has to offer the discipline of Philosophy?

Melvin: Well, I would start from different questions. I would ask what resources and with which questions can Philosophy help us Black Folks . I start from asking the question, what does Philosophy have to offer Black Folks ? I think it has the possibility of providing understanding, but what type of understanding? As I said earlier, I don’t want to dismiss statistical analysis, but I think that type of work might miss the mark. Why should we Black Folks go into this area or create and hold to a disposition that we call Philosophy. The thing about my experience is I know I could have gone into the law or some other field, but I perhaps would not be a systems thinker if it was not for my Philosophy. I think what my experience brings is that there are folks who do not make it, or make it differently at every level of society.

The Black experience can illuminate the fact that for as great as the United States is, it is really built on suffering and exploitation. My favorite film of all time is the remake of *Imitation of Life*, particularly that the last few moments when Mahalia Jackson sings “Troubles of the World.” You are moved to tears when you hear Mahalia say, “no more weeping and wailing,” and “Soon I will be done by troubles of the world, and I’m going home to live with my God.”¹⁴⁵ This is what we are: a legacy. We are the descendants of the slave trade. I would contend that

144. Wikipedia. “White Collar Boxing,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Collar_Boxing (accessed May 8, 2014).

145. “Troubles of the World,” Jackson, April, 10 2014 http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x9jlnx_mahalia-jackson-trouble-of-the-worl_shortfilms.

Black Folks could provide the child's experience in the "ones who walk away from Olmeas"¹⁴⁶ by Ursula K. Le Guin. History bears out that treating Black Folks badly is really this country's passion. Again Baldwin spoke to this beautifully when he said that "folks came to America on Monday speaking no English, but by Friday they were calling me a nigger."¹⁴⁷ If you are a Black Person in an anti-Black locale, you have a contribution to make. I have also thought if qualitative change is ever going to come, it is going to occur through Black Folks, by utilizing the qualities that we attribute to Blacks. What I am thinking of here is Faler's critique of William Bennett, who seems to think the less Black Folks around, the better things are.¹⁴⁸ He, like others, views us as problem people. But I hold that if this society said that we have to make a commitment to solve Black folk's problems then this society is radically improved.

Good Doctor: You were born in Memphis, Tennessee, and still have a sizable contingent of your family in that area of the South. Can you speak to me about the University of Memphis Model and what lessons can be taken from it? How can we use this model as a template for enlarging the discipline?

Melvin: The University of Memphis Model is a bit of misnomer, insofar as it is not like they set out to produce the outcome. Memphis did not set out to be the beacon of hope that it has been made out to be. In order to get Robert Bernasconi to come to Memphis, the Philosophy department agreed to allow him to *carte blanche* to recruit students as he saw fit. The University of Memphis Philosophy program has traditionally had a strong emphasis in feminist theory. So part of the reason they attracted Black Women was that they had a number of offerings in feminist theory. Memphis, at Bernasconi's urging, committed funds to the prospective graduate

146. Guin, Ursula K. *The wind's twelve quarters: short stories*. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

147. Baldwin, *Price of the Ticket*.

148. Faler, Brian. "Bennett Under Fire for Remark on Crime and Black Abortions." *The Washington Post*, September 30, 2005.

students. He all but jettisoned recruiting students from historically and predominantly White institutions.

The most fertile ground was Spellman College. The Memphis model revealed the different factors that affect Black students. For example, Black Men from HBCU's, who want to pursue graduate study in Philosophy, by and large, did not go to Memphis. This phenomenon was because Black Men generally want to attend graduate school at the most prestigious graduate institution they can. So Memphis never really attracted them. The Black female interested in pursuing Philosophy generally wants to attend institutions that would provide them a community of women to study with. That is why Memphis had a pipeline from Spellman. But the real problem with Memphis was when Robert Bernasconi left Memphis for Penn State, they faltered, as they did not admit a single Black student in the two years after he left. So, in many respects, Memphis just shifted sites to Penn State. Memphis got much acclaim for its Philosophy program, which I am sure they appreciated, but to use a phrase popular in hip-hop they were not "really about that life." The Whiteness of Philosophy in this regard is self-perpetuating. Additionally, I would be remiss if I did not say that for all the good Dr. Bernasconi has done, he still holds rather tightly to disciplinary conventions that I find to be barriers to entry for some would-be philosophers, namely the use of standardized test and language requirements.

I know that I did not feel that I should have to learn a foreign language because I am interested in Black Americans. Even if I wanted to study Fanon, I do not think learning French would significantly enhance my studies. I would contend philosophers have been the most resistant to a project of canon revision. We still have to defend the Black philosophical tradition.

If I were in English, I could contend that “out there” is a Black literary tradition.¹⁴⁹ This Black literary tradition is the basis for which I draw Black Philosophy its repository for it.

Good Doctor: With that being said, is there a Black Philosophy?

Melvin: This question I must answer with a qualified yes. This is because I do not believe in a unitary Black Philosophy, which is monocausal. I believe there are Black philosophies or Black philosophical themes that are important to most Black philosophers, but that would not necessarily mean that every Black philosopher would explore these themes. Much like in CRT, there are common cores and tenets we subscribe to, so there are the idealists and there are the racial realist schools.

For me, Black Philosophy must be steeped in a rich respect for the Black historical experience. Not a blind allegiance, but certainly a healthy respect for where Black Folks have gone, are now, and are going. In my estimation, an authentic Black Philosophy must believe that Black Folks have a contribution to the world’s intellectual community that only we can make. This point is certainly derived by my reading of *The Conservation of Races*.¹⁵⁰ This contribution of ours can only be made up as an authentic Black Philosophy must take the experience and literary expressions of these expressions as the prime source of philosophical investigation and knowing Black Folks are the central points of reference. This is not to say that a Black Philosophy would not necessarily be only concerned about Black Folks. A Black Philosophy is one that is concerned with the de-abstraction of Philosophy. In my view, the Black philosophical enterprise is one that is concerned with the social utility of the philosophical enterprise. Finally, any legitimate conceptualization of Black Philosophy must hold concretely to the first tenet of

149. Turner, Darwin, “Introductory Remarks about the Black Literary Tradition in the United States of America,” *Black American.* Literature Forum 12 (1978): 140-147.

150. Bois, W. E. B. *The Conservation of Races* The American Negro Academy. Occasional Papers No. 2. : Project Gutenberg, 2010.

Critical Race Theory , that race is the central focus of our analysis and that White supremacy is not aberrational. The natural question one must ask is: am I a Black philosopher? I would say “absolutely,” as we never do any thinking apart from or beneath our historical and cultural framework.

I am a Black man not simply because my mother and father are Black, but I would contend that being a Black philosopher and doing Black Philosophy is deeper. It is not just a matter of Black plus Philosophy. In my view, my Black experience is inscribed in everything I do; it is encoded in my very being. This very powerful insight came to me from two authors whose personal politics are far from mine. Specifically, I am thinking of Henry Louis Gates and John McWhorter. In Gates’ magisterial text *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*,¹⁵¹ Gates sets forth one of the useful tools that we might use to excavate the roots of Black Philosophy. Additionally in *Word on the Street: Debunking the Myth of “Pure” Standard English*¹⁵² by McWhorter, keep in mind politically I disagree with 99% of what comes out of his mouth. McWhorter, a trained linguist, argues that Black American English is in fact a different language than standard White English. More importantly, McWhorter speaks to how there is really a way one can talk White. To make a rather long story short, he puts forward the notion that Blacks who grow up in the rural South and those who grow up on say the south side of Chicago actually grow up speaking the same way. He believes this is so because of the lack of exposure to Whites. When we combine these insights, I think we can assume, as I do, that I talk like a Black Person who grew up around Black Folks and that what one hears when

151. Gates, Henry Louis. *The signifying monkey: a theory of Afro-American literary criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

152. McWhorter, John H. *The word on the street: debunking the myth of "pure" standard English*. Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus Pub., 2001.

one hears my voice, even when I code switch, you know it is a Black Person who is code switching.

Good Doctor: You mentioned early in our conversation some of your early intellectual contributors. Can you speak to individuals or works that have influenced more recently?

Melvin: I think most of us are composite thinkers and that is what I love about Philosophy. I take a lot from several sources. Even to this day, I am still very much influenced by the work of Karl Marx. Remember, I'm a Marxist at heart, of sorts. I guess this is even despite his obvious racism. Marx asserts:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas.¹⁵³

The Frankfurt School, particularly the work of Herbert Marcuse and Angela Davis, ask one of the most pressing questions I have come across. One of those problems of the age, if you will: "To what extent has the possibility of a qualitatively different social order become so obsolescent that the last bastion of hope for its realization is in the aesthetic dimension?" Is the aesthetic realm the last realm where we have folks talking about a different way of life? Where are the spaces in this life where we can fathom a different way? I grew up in the church and you know the issue on a different society is never too far from one's consciousness. Sadly many beloved churches have fallen prey to the capitalism of this age.

We are the folks who in this age who are trying to imagine different future for society. Far too many folks in this day see the entire goal of life as massive capital accumulation. I am

153. Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. The German ideology including Theses on Feuerbach. New York: (Great Books in Philosophy) (New York: Amherst, NY, 1998

not one who thinks quantitative change is necessarily qualitative in nature. For example, I do not think having a larger Black middle class is the precursor to a revolution. As important as Kenneth Chennault¹⁵⁴ or Richard Parsons¹⁵⁵ are to the aspirations of Black youth for a future that might be different than the one they are currently experiencing, they in and of themselves do not to me represent qualitative change. My critique of uncritical support of President Obama is chiefly based on this, as well. President Obama went to Columbia University and Harvard Law School. I would contend he fits the presidential mold more than he does not. Additionally, I find the Frankfurt School's silence on the Black liberation struggle to be highly problematic. All, save for Herbert Marcuse and the closely affiliated Walter Benjamin, were silent on the issue of race. This is what I have termed "White autism"—the inability of many White brothers and sisters to make their experiences in an empathic way with the racial other.

The study of architecture, coupled with knowing Tasha Marie Love, has also played a critical role in my development as it very concretely made me consider the bourgeoisie and ephemeral nature of much of Philosophy. She made me realize that hood folks generally do not get to go to graduate study, particularly graduate study in the discipline of Philosophy. She would constantly point this out through her experience in architecture school. I was encouraged to think more thoroughly about the implications of "neighborhood effects theory"¹⁵⁶ and environmental racism, namely what the built environment conveys about people in the spaces that they inhabit. This was crucial for me; as I have said before, I grew up in a housing project

154. Kenneth Irvine Chennault is an American business executive. He has been the CEO and Chairman of American Express since 2001. He is the third African-American CEO of a Fortune 500 company. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_Chennault.

155. Richard Dean Parsons is a former chairman of Citigroup and the former Chairman and CEO of Time Warner. He stepped down as CEO of Time Warner on December 31, 2007. He currently sits on the Board of Directors for the Commission on Presidential Debates. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Parsons_\(businessman\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Parsons_(businessman)).

156. Brooks-Gunn, Jeanne. "The Neighborhoods They Live In: The Effects of Neighborhood Residence on Child and Adolescent Outcomes." *Psychological Bulletin* 126: 309-337.

surrounded by a sewage plant and a dog food factory. Even as a youngster, I knew intuitively this was a debased position because of how our buildings were constructed spatially.

Additionally, my association with Tasha introduced me to the work of the great architectural theorist, Linda Groat. Professor Groat, I would contend, has put forth some of the best theoretical work on the discipline of architectural education and its dominant conceptions of what causes the discipline to be a repository of White male homogeneity with anti-female and anti-Black sentiment.¹⁵⁷ Her influence was also powerful, as she introduced me to the work that has forever changed my intellectual endeavors. I am specifically thinking of Darrell Wayne Fields' magisterial text, *Architecture in Black*.¹⁵⁸

This book shows most conclusively that G.W.F. Hegel absconded with the Blackness of architecture. In many respects, I am a truly composite thinker in what I bring to the discipline of Philosophy, but I always try to root my analysis in asking the question, what utility to my larger intellectual project can I draw from a particular work? Another example of this is my work with Dr. Ruby Mendenhall on racial Microaggressions literature. Had I never worked for her, I would have missed the insights provided by this field of study. Much of this work is from social psychology. For me, racial Microaggressions are the so-called little foxes that spoil the vine.¹⁵⁹ By that I mean simply that apparently infinitesimal phenomena can cause abhorrently incongruent damage. For example, in Philosophy when one explores the various websites of the top 50 departments of Philosophy, I would contend that one is bombarded with

157. Groat, Linda. "Architecture's Resistance to Diversity: A Matter of Theory as Much as Practice." *Journal of Architectural Education* 47 (1984): 3-10. See also Groat, Linda, and Sherry Ahrentzen. "Reconceptualizing Architectural Education for a More Diverse Future: Perceptions and Visions of Architectural Students," *Journal of Architectural Education* 49(1985): 140-147.

158. Fields, Darrell Wayne. *Architecture in black*. London: Athlone Press, 2000.

159. "Song of Solomon 2:15." In *Holy Bible: African American Jubilee edition: King James Version*. Jubilee ed. New York: American Bible Society, 1999.

Microaggressions, particularly micro-insults and micro-invalidations and environmental

Microaggressions, which are defined as

macro-level Microaggressions that occur as systematic forms of assaults (over hurtful messages), insults (subtle demeaning messages), and invalidations (messages that minimize or deny racialized experiences) environmental racial micro aggressions are derogatory messages conveyed by the environment that demean, exclude or invalidate people of color in a workplace or educational setting and negative messages, like racial slurs which appear in physical spaces.¹⁶⁰

I have recently investigated the Web pages of the top 50 departments of Philosophy in the English-speaking world. Only Rutgers, Princeton, Harvard, Syracuse, NYU, and Duke have a Black faculty member who has a permanent, 100% appointment in the department of Philosophy. The lone Philosophy department that had more than one Black faculty member was Penn State University; it was also the sole department that lists “Philosophy of Race” as an area of study for its five members who hold it at an area of concentration. Penn State University is the lone department that displays a Black thinker on the first page of its website. Next to the images of Immanuel Kant, Socrates, and Hannah Arendt, we see the side profile of W.E.B. Dubois.¹⁶¹

Penn State is far and away the best Philosophy department if one wants to study race, and yet despite this fact, it is not ranked amongst the top 50 programs in the United States according to the most esteemed Philosophy index.¹⁶² In fact this index did not even rank Philosophy of race as a subcategory of exploration. Until the year 2011, one had to only peruse this page for a few minutes by scrolling down to the very bottom page to see that Philosophy of race is listed 34th of 34 possible specialties listed. Feminism is listed 32nd. Immediately between the two is the ranking for Chinese Philosophy. There is no listing here of Africana Philosophy or African

160. Harwood, Stacy A., Margaret Brown -Hunt, and Ruby Mendenhall. "Racial Microaggressions at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: Voices of Students of Color Living in University Housing." CDMS Research Paper 1 (2010): 1.

161. Penn State University, Department of Philosophy website, April 10, 2014, <http://philosophy.la.psu.edu/>.

162. "Leiter., Brian. "Philosophical Gourmet Report." <http://www.philosophicalgourmet.com/> (accessed May 17, 2014)

American Philosophy. I would contend all of this constitutes Microaggressions. If I were a Black Person wanting to enter Philosophy, I would think this field had an implicit bias as college Web pages of the discipline are overwhelmingly White and male.

Good Doctor: Why are you drawn to Liberation Philosophy? Secondly, does this view make your Philosophy unnecessarily restrictive?

Melvin: My initial reaction to anyone who would ask me about Liberation Philosophy is a rather flippant: I am a Black man from the Dirty South. As a student of the legacy of the Black intellectual tradition, I am usually very suspicious of university Philosophy and philosophers who attempt to depoliticize the historical situation of a people. As a descendant of America's slave people, I cannot fathom not placing a high premium on thought that directly speaks to liberation from oppression. Now we must remember my grandfather had some acclaim in Osceola, Arkansas, as he was the overseer when folks would go to the cotton fields to "chop" cotton.

I spent most of my summers with my grandfather. He would take my brother and me so that we could have money for school clothes. Even at this young age, I felt a sense of connection to my Black forbears as I chopped the weeds away from the cotton in the fields where others had picked cotton only a generation and a half before me. I do not think one can help thinking about that. Please do not think I am saying to you that I know what it is like to be a slave just because I chopped cotton. My point here is simply I find it impossible to engage in more bourgeoisie academic Philosophy that seeks to be high minded, abstract, and universal. That, in my opinion, is what "White Philosophy" in the academy is.

I do not see myself as a consensus builder in this regard, so I would say to the second part of your question, you are right; I am really skeptical of thinkers who cannot speak to the hood.

All my intellectual heroes take the question of Black and human liberation seriously: Angela Davis, James Baldwin, Malcolm X, Dr. King, and Dr. Anita Allen. Dr. Allen is very insightful to me. As you well know, she got a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Michigan, but during graduate study, she realized that years of graduate training in Philosophy made her irrelevant to help others, so she went to law school so that her education could be used to help others. I have felt a similar experience with a few of my graduate courses in Philosophy—a certain type of irrelevance, let me say.

I have never taken a course on philosophical logic or taken a course on Wittgenstein, Philosophy of Mathematics, Philosophy of Mind, or the Philosophy of Language. That is too far removed from what concerns me. I have taken only one course on Aesthetics and Education. I was disappointed as this course was filled with brothers and sisters who wanted to talk about the beauty of art. In this sense, I think I am a bit like Dubois in his debate with Alan Locke. Art is only useful to me if it serves as propaganda for revolutionary thought towards liberatory ends. I am from the hood; I have never been drawn to art simply for beauty's sake. For example, NAS (Nasir Jones) has a song entitled "If I Ruled the World." Today many so called conscious hip hop fans find this song to be far more liberatory than I do. The song is not revolutionary or liberatory, in my estimation, as it simply just refashions the capitalist order in which Black and brown folks can take a greater piece of capitalism's pie. This is substantially one of the reasons why, as a youth, I left the Nation of Islam. This group is really a conservative Black capitalistic organization. They are not really nationalistic. Autonomy for most members is mass capital accumulation. This is one of the greatest lessons of Black history or one of the real gifts of Black people: we know that capitalism will not save us—that is taught by Tulsa, Oklahoma, Rosewood, Florida, and the other cities that history forgot. These two communities had Black enclaves

where Black Folks as a group were winning at the capitalistic game. White residents of both communities, when faced with direct economic competition, proceeded to burn these communities to the ground.

Good Doctor: You seem very suspicious of the new Global Studies Movement. Why is this so? Someone like you would like to think globally.

Melvin: Despite not speaking to this earlier, many key contributors to my concept of Black Philosophy are not from the United States. For example Edward Wilmot Blyden, Kwame Nkrumah, C.L.R. James, Stuart Hall, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Lewis Gordon, Charles Mills, of course Frantz Fanon, and probably the most influential, Joel Augustus Rogers.

After all, slavery and colonialism, in my view, is the real prime mover in the globalizing force was not slavery after the entire transnational affair. Did not the Republic of Haiti exist as the most profitable and important part of the French colonial empire? I remember when I was young and I learned that this tiny nation is the real reason that the United States is the size it is. We know it is at least partially the reason why Napoleon Bonaparte had to sell the Louisiana Territory so cheaply. I have always felt to some extent history has caused me to think the White world has conspired to undermine the success of Haiti. Thomas Jefferson, we know, was terrified by the Haitian revolution. Haiti is also a key element to the history of Western Philosophy as said in the article "Hegel and Haiti,"¹⁶³ which has been subsequently turned into a book, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History*.¹⁶⁴ The primary argument of this text is that it is very likely that the master slave dialectic Diaspora in lordship in bondage then one of the key contributions that Hegel makes to Western Philosophy is so because of this tiny Black nation. We know that,

163. Buck-Morss, Susan. "'Hegel and Haiti,'" *Critical Inquiry* 26 (2000): 821-865.

164. Morss, Susan, and Susan Morss. *Hegel, Haiti and Universal history*. Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009.

Hegel's master–slave dialectic has been influential in the social sciences, Philosophy, literary studies, Critical Theory, postcolonial studies and in psychoanalysis. Furthermore, Hegel's master–slave trope, and particularly the emphasis on recognition, has been of crucial influence on Martin Buber's relational schema in *I and Thou*, Simone de Beauvoir's account of the history and dynamics of gender relations in *The Second Sex* and Frantz Fanon's description of the colonial relation in *Black Skin, White Masks*.¹⁶⁵

The Hegelian system is seen as the culmination of the enlightenment project.¹⁶⁶

Blackness is also one of the key tropes of Hegel's aesthetics; it is curious that Hegel excludes architecture from his aesthetic hierarchy. Author Dwayne Fields asserts this is so because of “architecture's Blackness.” Fields contends in his text *Architecture in Black*¹⁶⁷ that architecture, as an aesthetic practice, and Blackness, as a linguistic practice, operate within the same semiotic paradigm.¹⁶⁸ The book presents the first systematic analysis of the theoretical relationship between architecture and Blackness. This text employs a technique whereby texts are related through the repetition and revision of their semiotic structures; by this, reading is then used to critique a discrete set of architectural texts, demonstrating the presence of the “Black vernacular” in contemporary architectural theory.”¹⁶⁹

I am very much interested in the global enterprise. For example, I am very much intrigued by the meaning of a transitional Blackness or that rising anti Black American sentiment has been a part of this McDonaldization of the globe is a bit ironic. In this regard Dr. Michael Peters has been rather invaluable to me. He allowed me to serve as a teaching assistant for his course on Global Citizenship. This was vital to me for several reasons. First it helped me think about cosmopolitanism. Is there really such a thing as a global citizen? Is birth the best

165. Ibid.

166. Farr, Arnold, and George Yancy. “Whiteness Visible: Enlightenment Racism and the Structure of Racialized Consciousness,” In *What White Looks Like: African-American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question*, New York: Routledge Press, 2004.

167. Fields, “*Architecture*”

168. Ibid.

169. Ibid.

determinant for citizenship rights? Through this class, I was really able to think about the manner in which Black Americans' freedom struggle and the claim for citizenship rights have been influential across the globe. The concept of citizen is additionally important for me as I use it as a heuristic device to talk about Philosophy. How does one become a citizen of this majestic polis called Philosophy?

What would this municipality's official tongue be? Would it be English, French, Greek, or German? Some would even ask why it could not be Italian or Spanish. I do think your question is right to point out that I fundamentally believe and have confronted high impregnable ignorance and condescending attitudes towards Americans from those involved in global studies and towards Americans of color, particularly African Americans. I have had it pointed out to me that only 39% of the American population has passports which means something about the extent to which Americans want to interact with the world. But I have had to point out to people that if one is able to travel internationally one is, in many respects, amongst the world's winners. If I think about my own case, I would not have ever been abroad if it had not been for my being in college and having the ability to take trips through school. I am not a thinker who puts the United States up on a pedestal, but I do not debase it just because it is not Europe. The global studies movement also appears to me to be a very sophisticated grab at world Whiteness.

If some of the global studies people are right and we now live in an age where there is a declining significance of the nation state, I would contend that we need to look more closely at C. Wright Mills' 1956 classic, *The Power Elite*.¹⁷⁰ Are we not really talking about the winners amongst winners when discussing most global studies folks? It bothers me to a certain extent that most of the folks who run the world all went to the same ten universities or the fact that every

170. Mills, C. Wright. *The Power Elite*. Reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

single one of the top ten world universities are in the United States or the United Kingdom.

Many brothers and sisters who are in these programs under theorize their race far too much for my liking. I would contend that this is very disingenuous.

For example, I have been told by many folks with a straight face that racism does not exist in Latin America and the Caribbean as it does in the United States. I always state that though that is true in part, I can take the White supremacist framework I am using in the United States and almost not miss a thing in Latin America, particularly a place like Brazil. If you can look at the Dominican Republic and take for example Sammy Sosa,¹⁷¹ tell me he does not have a color complex. Let us take India and the Fair and Lovely spots;¹⁷² they call the products that considerable numbers of folks use whitening creams. Not toner or pigment evener; they are explicitly called whitening creams.¹⁷³ Ponds offers a line of products labeled “White Beauty” and “Flawless White.”¹⁷⁴

Malcolm X talked to this point in his autobiography when he asserted,

This was my first really big step toward self-degradation: when I eroded all of the pain, literally burning my flesh to have it look like a White man’s hair. I had joined that multitude of negro men and women in America who are brainwashed into believing that Black people are inferior and that White people are superior that we will even violate and mutilate our God created bodies to try to look pretty by White standards.”¹⁷⁵

For about a year, even I as a young man permed my beard to make it more manageable. The disciplinary language is striking: I need to manage, tame or control my wild, thick beard. I remember going into the barber shop and upon making eye contact with me, my barber indicated

171. Kinsey, Joe. “Sammy Sosa Taking White Face to Next Level,” *Busted Coverage*, January 24, 2012.

172. For an interesting visual example of fetishised whiteness See “Indian obsession with whiteness/fairness/bleaching,” *YouTube April 10 2014*, http://www.youtube.com/watch=Z269dOL9r_k and “Fair n Lovely Ad India female,” *YouTube*, April 10 2014 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubbufbkbovY>.

173. “Ponds White Beauty,” *YouTube*, April 10 2014 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgx6xrc0gBs>.

174. “Ladies Center BlogSpot,” Ponds April 10 2014 <http://ladies-center.blogspot.com/2013/05/ponds-white-beauty-daily-spot-less.html>.

175. X, Malcolm, and Alex Haley. *The autobiography of Malcolm X*. Reprint, New York: One World/Ballantine Books, 1992.

that I should never attempt that again, so as long as I live. I left this out in my earlier comments on education and schools. For me, the question is not if the education system prepares Blacks in general, Black males in particular, for prison; it is to what extent does the education system prepare Black males for prison? To what extent by and large do some teachers act as if they are stand-ins for the police? The school system is the place where the Black body is supposed to learn how to regulate itself even in the absence of the White gaze. That is what is amazing about power: I remember when I was young my father would beat my mother rather savagely. He continued to do this until I got older and could stop him. He beat her so savagely once that he broke her jaw; she had to have it wired shut. Now consider that my father would leave for days at time and he would tell my mother she better not leave the house, and sure as the day is long, she would not leave the house. That struck me as very insightful about power, that she would modify her behavior and comportment even when he wasn't around—as if he was standing there. I do not think it is any coincidence that from the time I was in the third grade till the ninth grade that I was considered a BD/LD student, though I generally always had the best grades in classes. I do not think this was a coincidence that nearly all of the so called special education students in Sheridan Elementary and Bloomington Junior High School were Black students.

Chapter 3

Family Resemblances, Autobiographical Strands, The Historical Content, And Ontological Implications Of Black American Philosophy of Education

Philosophizing is inherently grounded in socially shared practice, not in transcendental rules. When we examine the work of Western philosophers, we notice that they share commonality only in a very general sense. Therefore all philosophical ideals are local to communities of thinkers; it is misleading for us to look for something more than family resemblances common to all activities we describe as Philosophy.¹⁷⁶

For far too long, the academic discipline of Philosophy in the United States has been, generally speaking, far too silent about the plight of African Americans. In my estimation, this phenomenon is slowly, but most assuredly, becoming narrowed chiefly because of the efforts of Black Academic Philosophers. I would argue that the key work that sparked this age was Leonard Harris's edited volume entitled *Philosophy Born of Struggle: Anthology of African American Philosophy from 1917*.¹⁷⁷ Published in 1983, this phenomenal, yet little read, text is a must read for anyone who takes the assertions of African American Philosophers seriously, these assertions being that there is an important philosophical contribution that non-Whites can make to the academic discipline of Philosophy in general and the Philosophy of Education in particular. Of particular importance for me and Professor Harris alike is the probative value the African American social context can give to the manner in which Philosophy is said to be experienced and how this experience is explained.

In my estimation, for far too long, the image of the Philosopher in the United States has been dominated by tweed jacket wearing, pipe smoking, older White gentlemen who may or may not have a long, unkempt beard. This chapter is an attempt to broaden the scope of the American

176. Bassey, M.O. "What Is African Critical Theory Or Black Existential Philosophy?" *Journal of Black Studies*: 914-935.

177. Harris, Leonard. *Philosophy born of struggle: anthology of Afro-American philosophy from 1917*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Pub. Co., 1983.

enterprise of Philosophy by specifically looking at the historical roots of the African American Philosophy of Education . This will be achieved by interpreting three seminal texts, often used in Educational History courses on the American schooling system. The texts under our examination here are first Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*,¹⁷⁸ Secondly we shall exam Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography*,¹⁷⁹ and finally we pay attention to W.E.B. Dubois' masterpiece, *The Souls of Black Folk*.¹⁸⁰ By excavating the motivations of African Americans' educational pursuits, it is my assertion that we not only garner a historical account of the conditions of Blacks at a specific historical moment, we can also see the emergence of a philosophical movement that still is tremendously valuable even to this present age. It is with this assertion and other questions in mind that I penned this chapter.

I am not a subscriber to the increasingly evermore common notion that we are currently living in the post-racial epoch. This notion is asserted by and large because on January 20, 2009,¹⁸¹ the primary occupants of perhaps the world's most recognizable residence, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, was for the first time in this country's history not entirely White. Some readers might suggest that this occurrence means that our views on race must be inexorably modified. The question then may be asked, why then is the vexing question of race morphing? Is this phenomena so because of impending demographic shifts? More plausible, in my estimation,

178. Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave*. Reprint, New York: Random House, 2004.

179. Washington, Booker T. *Up from slavery; an autobiography*. Reprint, New York: Dover Press, 1995.

180. Dubois, *Souls*.

181. Wise, Tim J. *between Barack and a hard place: racism and White denial in the age of Obama*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2009.

is that race is not as static as we commonly would believe it to be. Stuart Hall forwarded a sentiment that argues “no concept in society is asked to do that which we ask race.”¹⁸²

Sociologist Dalton Conley in his seminal text *Being Black Living in the Red Race and Class in America*¹⁸³ provides a context to question the notion of Black progress, despite some Blacks making considerable gains. Currently African Americans account for approximately 1% of the United States GDP. This gain represents a rise in total wealth from one half of 1% that Blacks possessed as of 1900. Conley further shows the extent to which Blacks’ home ownership in general terms is in a state of decline. To the uninitiated reader, this assertion by Conley’s work might be seen as somewhat counterintuitive. After all, are not Black Folks doing really well in this new less racially conscious society? This is the new epoch where color blindness is said to be the reasonable ideology of racial discourse. Is it not the Black middle class by most measures the largest it has ever been in this society? Are there not more Blacks in college than ever in this nation’s history?

If one uses the popular media as one’s chief mode of knowledge acquisition, one might genuinely ask the question if there are more prominent Blacks in our current society than ever before. An appropriate response to this was leveled by Dr. Cameron McCarthy who correctly points out that “one of the current difficulties in the educational literature on race relations is its refusal of the popular American middle-class White youth and adults get more of their social construction of inner-city Blacks through the media—particularly, television and film—than through personal or classroom interaction or even in textbooks.”¹⁸⁴

182. Stuart Hall: *Race, The Floating Signifier*. VHS. Directed by Stuart Hall. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 1996.

183. Conley, Dalton. *Being Black, Living in the Red: Race and Class in America*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University Of California, 1999

184. McCarthy, “Living with Anxiety,” 354

I imagine the reader might retort with examples such as Will Smith, Oprah Winfrey, Tiger Woods, LeBron James, Kobe Bryant, Jay Z, the late Tupac Shakur, and Snoop Dogg. Are these not amongst the most well-known and compensated entertainers of this present historical moment? Are not Cornel West, Bell Hooks, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Charles Ogletree, Derrick Bell, and Christopher Edley some of the most sought-after public intellectuals in the modern academy?

Still others might say are not Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Richard Parsons, Kenneth Chennault, the late Reginald Lewis, Vernon Jordan, and the late Ron Brown proof positive of Black progress? Are these Blacks not representative of the tremendous gains that Blacks have ascended to, as these folks represent some of the highest levels of business, military and politics? Consider the state of Illinois alone has produced three of the nine U.S. Senators. In fact on January 30, 2013, there was for the first time in the nation's history two Black United States senators. The Land of Lincoln is home to one time Senate President Emil Jones, former Attorney General and then Senator Roland Burris, former Senator Carol Moseley Braun, and last but certainly not least in this litany, President Barack Obama, who most pundits agree was the first credible Black candidate for the nation's highest political office (Though this in and of itself raises potential in racially charged questions insofar as what makes a candidate credible. But that is not the focus of this text).

The cynic in me would like to point out that our nation's most populous and powerful state, California, alone represents the same number of White women senators as African American senators. Currently, there are 17 female senators. I am not trying to dismiss the symbolic progress that has surely been made by some African Americans. In fact, I am living

proof that progress has been made; I am a high school dropout and the first member of my native Arkansas family to look at, much less go to, a college.

I do not share the sentiment of Kwame Anthony Appiah and others who concluded that race talk should be distressing to anyone who takes culture seriously. Put differently, Professor Dwayne Tunstall asserts, “Questioning the reality of racial categories does not mean they are unreal. However, what it does mean is that they are not universal features of the human condition. Instead they are significant social and cultural concepts that have partially determined what it means to be human for several centuries in many western and westernized societies.”¹⁸⁵

In my estimation, the assertion of a post racial epoch leads me to conclude perhaps that there is still something very pervasive and ideologically loaded about race talk. Even if we could create the alleged post-racial society, one should be cautious about such an undertaking. Lucius Outlaw forwards, “Political movements that seek identity and recognition and thereby respect and seek to empower racial and ethnic outsiders and other political movements that that are grounded in the affirmations of a common humanity of all people’s potential threaten political and social unity.”¹⁸⁶ It must be then asked, is it possible in the foreseeable future to forward a politic tied to the preservation of so-called racial distinction that does not threaten to destabilize the social order?

To this end, Outlaw and others have a concern about the formulation of a viable concept of race that will be of services to “a non-insidious conversation of racial formulation absent the quagmire of chauvinism.”¹⁸⁷ Professor Cornel West has a special place in the minds and hearts of anyone who expresses an interest in the academic discipline of African American Philosophy in

185. Tunstall, Dwayne. "Taking Africana Existential Philosophy of Education Seriously." *Philosophical Studies in Education* 39 38: 46-55.

186. Outlaw, *Critical Social Theory in the Interests of Black Folks*.

187. Ibid. Outlaw,

general, and the Philosophy of Education in particular. This is because he is arguably the preeminent Public Intellectual of this current epoch in the United States.

With this in mind, West states that, as it pertains to African American Philosophy, two problems loom prominently. He defines them as problems of self-image and problems of self-determination.¹⁸⁸ He defines these issues in the following manner: the former he describes as “a perennial human attempt to define who and what one is.”¹⁸⁹ And the latter is a “political struggle to gain significant control over the major institutions that regulate people’s lives. These challenges are abstractly distinguishable yet in his view concretely inseparable.”¹⁹⁰ Thus West and others forward the necessity for African Americans who are concerned with what might be termed the Philosophy of the Black Experience to never make the mistake of divorcing the culture realm from political considerations.¹⁹¹

At this point, I would like to operationally define what can best be termed the presuppositions of what it means to be racially Black. Tunstall forwards that as it relates to the United States, “The lived experience of many persons of African descent in the United States to be Black in an anti-Black world means that one is burdened with justifying one’s personhood to racist White persons and to justify one’s personhood is to present oneself as a given existent object.”¹⁹²

With this in mind, the major function of African American Philosophy is to “reshape the contours of Black history and provide new self-understanding of the Black experience, which

188. West. "A Companion to African-American Philosophy. *Philosophy and the African American Experience*, Edited by Tommy Lott and John Pittman, New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

189. Ibid., West 2003

190. Ibid., West 2003

191. Ibid., West 2003

192. Ibid., West 2003

suggests desirable outcomes in the present. Black Philosophy attempts to make theoretically explicit what is implicit in the African American history and offer certain solutions to urgent problems besetting Black Americans.”¹⁹³

It is with the above considerations in mind that one might consider the extent to which the following question is meaningful for purposes of our current excavation. To put it rather crudely, does there exist an African American Philosophy of Education anywhere in the world? And if the question is affirmative, where is it? Notwithstanding the clearly problematic nature of the question, I feel that one would be hard pressed to point to a substantive White Philosophy of Education. As I imagine White folks are never seen in such monolithic terms as to render the question to be explicitly that intelligible, one might say there is a German Philosophy of Education or that there are Pragmatic Educational claims that can be made on education.

Nevertheless, a possible means to broach this issue would be through analogy to another more solidly accepted school of philosophical inquiry, namely that of Marxism. Professor West and others have argued that there is a distinction to be made and to be drawn between Marxist thought and so-called Marxist theory.¹⁹⁴ To put it rather crudely and reductively, Marxist thought, in my estimation, could rightly be said to be a unitary, self-contained, monocausal, and generally glaring ahistorical means of theorizing, which usually makes the error of being rather economically reductionist in form, function, and focus. This is in contradistinction to Marxist theory, which is a lens through which to view the world. I imagine adherents share the general theoretical tendency of so-called main line Marxists to reduce every social interaction to transient phalanges of the economic sphere. It is my view that not even in an advanced

193. West. "A Companion to African-American Philosophy." *Philosophy and the African American Experience*, Edited by Tommy Lott and John Pittman, New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

194. Cornel West "The Indispensability yet Insufficiency of Marxist Theory," *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2000).

capitalistic society, such as the United States, everything is simply reducible to its relationship to the means of production.¹⁹⁵

I would contend that when we are going to think of a Philosophy of Education pertaining to African Americans, we must define education in its broadest sense. The historian Lawrence Cremin in *Tradition of American Education*¹⁹⁶ provides us with an operational definition of education by stating that education is “the deliberate systematic and sustained effort to transmit and evoke or acquire knowledge, values, skills, attitudes, or sensibilities as well as any outcomes of this effort.”¹⁹⁷ Now that we have a sufficiently broad definition of education, perhaps it would now please the reader to have me forward a working definition of African American Philosophy, of which the Philosophy of Education would be the progeny.

West asserts African American Philosophy to be

The defining account of Black history highlighting the cultural heritage and political struggles which provide desirable norms for the regulation of the response to particular challenges confronting African Americans presently. Thus Black Philosophy is the application of philosophical techniques of integration and justification to the African American Experience. The particularly historical phenomena to be defined and justified by African American Philosophy consist of religious doctrines, political ideologies, artistic expressions, and unconscious modes of behavior. Such phenomena serve as the raw ingredients to be utilized by Black Folks to interpret the Black past and defend particularly norms within the past.¹⁹⁸

As I have forwarded previously in this text, the pursuit of an African American Philosophy and the creation of a Black Philosophy of Education for those of us who occupy

195. West. "A Companion to African-American Philosophy. "Philosophy and the African American Experience, Edited by Tommy Lott and John Pittman, New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

196. Lawrence Cremin, *Traditions of American Education* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

197. West. "A Companion to African-American Philosophy. "Philosophy and the African American Experience, Edited by Tommy Lott and John Pittman, New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

198. West, "Companion to African-American Philosophy," pp 205

Black bodies in the United States make it difficult, though not impossible to point to a philosophical tradition if we keep our focus solely on those who hold the professional credential of a doctorate in the academic discipline of Philosophy.

As Lewis Gordon and others have asserted that even at this current historical moment, the vast majority of those Black Folks who practice philosophical techniques are not in academic departments of Philosophy. Consider that Cornel West, despite being one of the few African Americans who holds the professional credential, has never held an academic appointment in a Philosophy department. To put it rather crudely, this fact simply is what it is and I think it speaks to the current state of the academic division of labor in departments in the current academy. Professor West asserts that the history of African American Philosophy could rightly be said to center in the following four strains of thought: the Vitalist Tradition, the Humanist Tradition, the Rationalist Tradition, and finally the Existential Tradition. The Vitalist Tradition has, like the other traditions, two variants: a strong and a weak current. Both the strong and the weak Vitalist share the presupposition that Black Folks have a unique contribution and personality to add to the philosophical enterprise. To this end, West asserts the following:

The self-image in the Vitalist Tradition is one of pride and self-congratulation and often heroism as Blacks are considered to be more human: meek, kind and creative than members of other racial groups. Less malicious, mendacious, belligerent and bellicose or avarice. This tradition posits Black superiority not over all others but specifically over White Americans.¹⁹⁹

The strongest proponent of the strong Vitalist Tradition is none other than the great W.E.B. Dubois. West asserts that Marcus Garvey, amongst others, forwarded a weaker strain of

193. West "The Cornel West Reader." Possible Themes, Edited by Cornel West, 302-316. New York: Basic Civats Books, 1997.

Vittalist than did Dubois. In the eyes of West, the summit of Weak Vittalist thought is found in the philosophical writings and speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.²⁰⁰

The Rationalist Tradition inverts the Vittalist Tradition and claims Black inferiority not to all racial groups but specifically to White folks. The primary proponent of this tradition is E. Franklin Frazier, particularly in his early works. The Black tradition of Existentialist thought is one that West asserts “promotes a self-image of confinement and creativity restriction and revolt. It encompasses a highly individualistic revolt, rebellion of Blacks who are marginal to or exist on the edges of Black culture and see no use in assimilating into the Black mainstream. It expresses a critical disposition towards both Black Culture and American Society.”²⁰¹

The place where one is most likely to come into contact with the full majesty of this strain of thought is in the collected works of what I view the Black Literary Holy Trinity. This group consists of: Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison. The Humanist strain in African American Philosophy is best exemplified in the Black musical tradition. West states, “The Humanist response to the challenge of self-image and self-determination is the promotion of unconstrained individuality strengthened by the honest encounter with the Black past and expansion of the democratic control over the major institutions that regulate lives in the United States and abroad.”²⁰²

In an effort to make the four strands of Black Philosophy and the Black Philosophy of Education more salient, perhaps it would prove useful to the reader to consider notable producers of what I would broadly term the African American Philosophy of Education.

194. West “The Cornel West Reader.” Possible Themes, Edited by Cornel West, 302-316. New York: Basic Civats Books, 1997.

195. Ibid.

196 Ibid ,West 1997

Fredrick Douglass: The Progressive Radical Democrat

Let us begin our excavation of this issue with a closer look at the thoughts of Frederick Douglass, who was both an autodidactic and genius whose multiple autobiographies I believe serve as a rich repository of the value of education. I do not think it a stretch to consider him a seminal figure in and contributor to the formulation of the Black Philosophical and Educational canon. His thoughts seem particularly important in the realm of Educational Theory, Political, and Social Philosophies and Existential reality. He might be the greatest non-religious practitioner of Black Homiletics, and Abolitionist, and a Socratic gadfly for the nation.²⁰³ In this text taken from the first of his three autobiographies, *The Narrative Of The Life of Frederick Douglass; An American Slave 1845*,²⁰⁴ Frederick Douglass gives us an introspective after-the-fact account of his educational experience as a young enslaved human being. Douglass, unlike some of those who later would become abolitionists or commentators on the peculiar institution, was himself once a slave. Douglass commences this narrative by remembering and recounting the rage (implicit violence) his so-called master had enacted on his wife, so-called mistress of the house, for the attempt to teach the then fourteen-year-old Douglass the highly questionable offense of reading. This so-called master admonished his wife about the inconceivability of this act. In my view, I believe this phenomenon was due to the following reasons that we can excavate from the text. Most obviously, and I think less centrally, the master admonished his wife for teaching a slave to read so because it was patently illegal to do so; the mistress was

203. Dillard, Angela D. *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Now? Multicultural Conservatism in America*. New York: New York University Press, 2001. Of particular interest here is chapter two entitled "Malcolm X's Words in Clarence Thomas's Mouth: Black Conservatism and The Making of An Intellectual Tradition." This text argues that one of the strategies black conservatives have used in an effort to build their canon is to actually appeal to long revered Black heroes like Malcolm X and other one of the key efforts of think recovery was through the Black jeremiad the master practitioner of this recovery was one Frederick Douglass. This is not to say that Douglass was a right wing thinker. Blacks on the political right simply tried to link themselves to black luminary's thought like Douglass sought rhetorically to link the struggle for Blacks and women to the large struggle of the nation. Black Americans have made this practices a nigh art form consider both the admonishments of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

204. Douglass, Frederick, Peter Gomes, and Gregory Stephens. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Signet Classics). New York: New American Library, 2005.

breaking the law by teaching this perceived subhuman to read. Secondly, this point is connected to the first, yet distinct from it. This phenomenon was so because it was both a participatory and prescribed disutility to do so. By this, I mean to assert that in the so-called master's mind, there could be no practical reason for a slave to read, particularly in light of the time. In an age where literacy was a very scarce resource so much so that so very few Whites or off-Whites (and Whites of a different hue) could in fact read.

The frustration with the mistress from the so-called master reflects an all too often poorly understood corollary value to White supremacy: the principle of "White Entitlement."²⁰⁵ What would it mean for a Black Person to possess a social good that so very few Whites could themselves claim? To put it rather crudely on the ideological plain, the subjective position that Douglass occupies as a slave is not just merely his slave position. Frederick Douglass was both a slave and a Black Person in America's Racial Caste System. Though some might suggest that this phenomenon of racial caste is a thing of the past, as I have asserted in this chapter, a Global Hierarchy of Race that has vestiges in the past exists. Consider Martin Jacques who states:

The existence of a de facto global racial hierarchy helps to shape the nature of racial prejudice exhibited by other races. Whites are universally respected, even when that respect is combined with strong resentment. A race generally defers to those above it in the hierarchy and is contemptuous of those below it. The Chinese—like the Japanese—widely consider themselves to be number two in the pecking order and look down upon all other races as inferior. Their respect for Whites is also grudging—many Chinese believe that western hegemony is, in effect, held on no more than prolonged leasehold. Those below the Chinese and the Japanese in the hierarchy are invariably people of colour (both Chinese and Japanese often like to see themselves as White, or nearly White). At the bottom of the pile, virtually everywhere it would seem, are those of African descent, the only exception in certain cases being the indigenous peoples.²⁰⁶

205. Jacques, Martin. "'The Global Hierarchy of Race as the Only Racial Group that Never Suffers Systemic Racism, Whites Are in Denial about its Impact'." *Guardian/UK*, September 20, 2003.

206..Ibid, Jacques, "Global Hierarchy

This is why it was untenable for him to gain literacy he was both Black and a slave. One position is practical; the other is based on ideological conceptions of what a Black is to be. It is with this in mind I believe that the so-called master attests to the following:

All a nigger should know is to obey his master to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. If you teach that nigger how to read there will be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He was at once become unmanageable and of no value to his master. As to himself he could do him no good of but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontent and unhappy.²⁰⁷

Though it is probably appropriate here to point out that some of the insights that Douglass extrapolates from this event, he in all likelihood did not fully become entirely aware of until he was much older. Despite the merit of this point, I do not believe that it in any way invalidates the explanatory value that we might excavate from his reflective praxis. After this incident, Douglass resolved in his mind to garner as best he could the tool of literacy. This phenomena was so because in his mind it was going to render him unfit to be a captive of the peculiar institution.

Douglass posits additionally a crucial insight about the psychological cost that slavery requires of both the enslaved and the enslaver. Despite his mistress being in his mind a “kind and tenderhearted woman,”²⁰⁸ she nevertheless ruthlessly and with no apparent hesitation begins acts of depravity in an effort to extinguish the flame of literacy in Douglass. The irony here of course is that she was instrumental in initially sparking this soon-to-be conflagration. Though Douglass in all likelihood did not realize it at the time, I believe he rightly points out that slavery was harmful to both parties and caused harm to the human whose life was converted into a commodity, chattel. But the White Slaveholder paid an additional price; this price in my view

207. Douglass, Frederick. *Life and times of Frederick Douglass: his early life as a slave, his escape from bondage, and his complete history: an autobiography*. New York: Gramercy Books, 1993.

208. Douglass, Narrative,

was both psychological and spiritual. To this end Douglass asserts the following: “She (Mrs. Auld) at first lacked the depravity indispensable to shut me up the mental darkness it was a least necessary for her to undergo training and exercise of irresponsible power, to make her equal to the task of treating me as though I was a brute.”²⁰⁹

Douglass shows the cost that White Slave Owners had for their investment in the White Systems of Racial Privilege, which made her divest of, as Douglass puts it, her more heavenly qualities. To this end Douglass states the following, which I cite at length for its probative value:

When I first went to live with her, she treated all in a manner as she suppose one human being should treat another in entering upon the release of a slaveholder, she did not seem to perceive that I sustained to her the relation of mere chattel. For her to treat me as a human being was not only wrong but dangerously so slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me, she was a warm pious tenderhearted woman there was no sorrow or suffering for which she did not have a tear she had bread for the hungry, clothes for the naked and comfort for every mourner that chain within her reach under its influence slavery transformed the tender heart soon became a stone and the lamb like disposition soon gave way to a tiger like fierceness the first step in her downward course was in her ceasing teach me. She now commenced to practice her husband's precepts she then became more violent than her husband himself. She was not satisfied simply doing well as she was commanded she seemed anxious to do better. Nothing seemed to make her angrier than to see me with the newspaper.²¹⁰

Perhaps Douglass’ so-called mistress’s venom is rooted in her own somewhat precarious position in America’s social hierarchy. It could be argued that as a woman her treatment of Douglass might be seen, I imagine by some feminist thinkers and other social critics, as her trying to take on and embody those very characteristics that bring about her own subordination, namely the characteristic of patriarchy. Perhaps in order to keep her husband appeased, she must show that she is worthy of the mantel of Whiteness, by keeping her foot on the neck of this particular Black. Of primary import and exploration for this text is the following: How and to what extent do Blacks find the pursuit of education to be a utility to themselves, and the larger

²⁰⁹. Douglass, *Narrative*,

²¹⁰. Ibid.

community? It is my view that Douglass' essay might be seen as a fairly representative account of this so-called utility. I would argue this in that it is unquestionably descriptive in showing that enslaved African folks found that education was in fact the key ingredient to render them unsuitable for slavery; this is of tantamount utility in and of itself. To this end Douglass asserted the following, which I cite at length for its evidentiary value:

I now understood what to me had been a most perplexing difficulty to whit the White man's power to enslave the Black man. It was a grand achievement and I prized it highly from that moment I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom it was just what I wanted and I got it at a time when I least expected. I was saddened by the thought of losing the aid of my kind of mistress, I was glad by the invaluable instruction which by the merest accident, I had gained from my master, though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set out with a high hope and fixed a purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read. The very decided manner with which he spoke, and strove to impress his wife with the evil consequences of giving me instructions served to convince me that he was deeply sensible of the truths he was uttering. It gave me the best assurance that I might rely with the utmost confidence on the results with which he said, would flow from teaching me to read. What he most dreaded, in fact I am most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated. That which to him was a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good to be diligently sought and the argument which he so warmly urged, against my learning to read only serve to inspire me with a desire and a determination to learn. In learning to read all almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master, as to the kind the aid of my mistress I acknowledge the benefits of both.²¹¹

In my estimation, the insight Douglass gives our demonstrative of the extent to which in this country one might be safe in generalizing that African American Education progress might be seen by many in the White majority in the United States as a zero-sum game. That is to say those Whites generally perceive African American progress to be a direct result of a White person's loss. This concept has an explanatory resonance, even when this phenomenon is not necessarily so. I draw several other inferences from this passage by Douglass that I believe speak to a unique complexity of obstacles that African Americans had to surmount to garner literacy and educational opportunities. This phenomena speaks to the importance of literacy and

211. Douglass, *Narrative*,

education to the historical experience of Black Americans. In my estimation, Blacks had to surmount both weak and strong forms of racism from the White status quo to obtain their educational outcomes. Today, African American Philosophers, Educational Theorists, and other Social Scientists make a concentrated effort to make theoretical distinctions between the ideologies of those thinkers who might be termed Weak Racists,²¹² in contrast those thinkers who exhibit a form of Strong Racism.²¹³

A thinker who might be termed a Weak Racists generally tends to believe in the inequality of the racial groups, or to put it rather crudely, a Weak Racists might truly believe in the innate intellectual inferiority of say African Americans vis-à-vis the vast majority of the White populace. Similarly, Strong Racists believes in the inherent inferiority of African Americans but are distinct from the Weak Racists in that they take an extra step, namely the attempt to prove their beliefs by empirical and or scientific rationality, and/or they attempt to impede attempts by groups of lower strata from obtaining social goods.²¹⁴

For example, relatively recently Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein's book *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*²¹⁵ and Arthur Jensen's famous article "How Much Can We Boost I.Q. and Scholastic Achievement?"²¹⁶ Are representative of this type of thinking. Now considering Douglass' description of his so-called mistress, our actions are demonstrative of both prongs of this theoretical racial dichotomy. Not to mention here would be

212. Squadrito, Kathy, Julie Ward, and Tommy Lott. "Locke and the Dispossession of the American Indian," In *Philosophers on race: critical essays*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002. Text revisits the case for weak and strong racism that is premised on utilization. It argues, in part, that some Europeans used some Native Americans groups' reluctance to cultivate the land as proof that these groups were not fit to hold the rights to these lands. A less extreme version of this might be found in the present day academy, say when one is evaluating an academic piece. My point is the tendency to superimpose our standards on other groups is not a thing of the past.

213. Squadrito, "Locke and the Dispossession of the American Indian"

214. Squadrito, "Locke and the Dispossession of the American Indian"

215. Herrnstein, Richard J., and Charles A. Murray. *The bell curve: intelligence and class structure in American life*. New York: Free Press, 1994.

216. Jensen, Arthur. "How Much Can We Boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement." *Harvard Educational Review* 39, no.1.

remiss of me to point out that clearly neither Douglass' mistress nor his so-called master attempt to verify Black inferiority by scientific terms. Black inferiority, in my estimation, to them is borne out in a Black Person's slave positionality.

My point here is to show that both Douglass and I are aware of a twofold racial phenomenon that has played in terms of Black Educational goals. Slavery caused many Whites to be indifferent to the plight of Blacks. In my view, the so-called mistress ceasing to teach the young Douglass is demonstrative of a form of weak, or minimally, a less strong form of racial practice. She behaves in a strong racialized way in which he actively attempts with animus to keep Douglass from reading. (One could certainly argue that I am being very reductionist in this reading.)

My point here is that Douglass shows that Blacks faced then (and to some extent still face) twin obstacles. They face first the obstacles of those Whites who would not aid in the fulfillment of Black educational needs. Secondly Blacks also face opposition from Whites who find it their duty to actively pursue the end of blocking Black educational advancement. Here it might be rightly asked, what was it about the ideological construction of slavery that forced a so-called good White Woman like Douglass' mistress to actively seek to treat another human being so inhumanely?

Legal Scholar and Critical Race Theorist Thomas Ross might provide us with some insights as to the operation of this phenomenon in his seminal article entitled "The Rhetorical Tapestry of Race."²¹⁷ Ross posits the following about for peculiar institution of Chattel Slavery:

The shank of the rhetoric supporting institution of slavery was constructed simply. Once that passed establishing the non-humanity the rest was easy if Whites had any moral obligation whatsoever in the matter it was to African Americans it was to farther the

217. Ross, Thomas. "The Rhetorical Tapestry of Race: White Innocence and Black Abstraction." William & Mary Law Review 32, no.1 (1990).

interest of White Society, a society from which African Americans were systematically excluded. The horrific conditions of slave existence became the tokens of charity and benevolence to the Black Beast. This particular rhetoric in its various forms and manifestations always avoided any real conflict in values and principles by placing African American outside the community of humanity.²¹⁸

It is my view that it is of vital importance to begin our analysis mindful of the sacrifice of a luminary like Douglass, both he and countless other African-Americans who resisted the Master /Slave dichotomy.²¹⁹ These courageous individuals were exerting a tremendous amount of personal agency in their attempt to subvert the racial caste system. This caste we know constructed their Black Humanity as less than others. In my estimation, Douglass exhibits a level of genius that is nigh unparalleled in the corpus of American Literature, even though he did not articulate it as such at his tender age of fourteen. Douglass clearly exhibits a masterful understanding of White Americans' collective cognitive process. Frederick Douglass demonstrates the practical utility of understanding the collective White cognitive processes by convincing unwitting White Children to teach him how to read. Consider the psychological implications of Douglass' actions when he tells us of his encounters with White Children with the following: "Whenever I met with any boy I knew who could write, I would tell him that I could write as well as he."²²⁰

Douglass gained as he says numerous writing lessons by manipulating the power of White folk's disbelief. Consider the extent to which Douglass is worried about embarrassing some of his former instructors, whom he gave food to for helping him write. Douglass, though tempted to give the names in print as an effort to demonstrate his sincere gratitude and affection,

218. Ross, "The Rhetorical Tapestry of Race

219. Morss, Susan. *Hegel, Haiti and Universal history*. Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009. In this text, Buck-Morss sets out and convincingly argues that one of the central tropes of the Hegelian cannon the Master slave dialectic of lordship and bondage is rooted in Hegel's close reading of the situation between France and Saint-Domingue (Haiti).

220. Douglass, *Narrative*,

knows that it would not be perceived by the larger White community as such and does not do so in my estimation because he understands the myriad ways which Whiteness operates. Douglass is clearly aware of the necessity of the African-Americans by hiding his light under the proverbial bushel basket.

The text is also very in the indicative as a historical document as it shows the manner in which the category of Whiteness has morphed over the course of the nation's dynamic racial history. Consider when Douglass tells the story of a chance encounter he had with some folks who were off-White:

I went one day down to the wharf for Mrs. Watters and seen two Irishmen unloading a scow of stone. I went unasked and helped them. When we had finished one of them came to me and asked curiously if I was a slave. I told them I was; he asked if I was a slave for life I told them I was. The good Irishman seemed deeply affected by this statement he said to the other that it was a pity so fine a little fellow such as myself should be a slave for life, they both bid me that I should run away to the North.²²¹

What would possess two White Men to engage in such a conversation with the young Black man of the tender age of fourteen? Perhaps the Irishmen's sympathy for Douglass was made manifest because he was still a fairly young boy. I imagine he posed no perceived threat in their minds to the racial status quo. Adults often might express sympathy with a child who shows promise despite facing tremendous obstacles. Though not explicitly in the text, I think we could rightly infer that Douglass saw them as Whites of a different sort, and this is why he refers to them as "Goodly Irishman."²²² I would imagine the term "goodly" was used as a modifier as the Irish were not often thought to be good folks. Douglass invokes parallels to the Good Samaritan of the Christian New Testament. It might also be argued that the most subversive narrative of the Bible is when Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. This is because in the epoch in

²²¹ Douglass, *Narrative*,

²²² Ignatiev, Noel. *How the Irish became White*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

which the story is written, there is no group who was more anathema to a group of so-called good observant Jews than would be a Samaritan. Consider that historically “portraying a Samaritan in positive light would have come as a shock to Jesus’ audience. It is typical of his provocative speech in which conventional expectations are inverted.”²²³ Douglass is perhaps troubling the racial waters even more than he is often credited. Is he speaking subversively about the racial status of so-called off-Whites as well? In my estimation, this was clearly said to let the reader know that these two men were not your typical White People. After all, these men encouraged the young Douglass to break the law by running away; clearly this also indicates they had a different position on the social caste system. If it pleases the reader, who perhaps remains skeptical, I would certainly not find this wholly unmerited, as Douglass himself, despite having a genteel conversation with these men, is still cautious. He says: “[I] pretended not to be interested in what they said and I treated them as if I did not understand them, for fear they might be treacherous. White Men have been known to encourage slaves to run away and then to get the reward, catch them and return them to their masters I was afraid that these seemingly good men might use me so.”²²⁴

Douglass’ admission here is representative of the extent to which no Black Person could afford to be ignorant to the mere possibility of betrayal of even a so-called well-intentioned White person. Notice he says “seemingly good” Whites, as they may still have been agents of the then present social order. My point here is to simply sketch the changing contours of America’s racial order. Before moving on to consider the educational contributions of thinkers such as Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois, the life and times of Frederick Douglass holds sway

223. Funk, Robert Walter, and Roy Hoover. *The Five Gospels: the search for the authentic words of Jesus*. New York: Macmillan, 1993.

224. Douglass, *Narrative*.

in my estimation as both an educational and social philosophical treatise. This phenomenon is so because the reader is also taken on the philosophical and material journey from Black servitude to emancipation. Douglass poses for us deep philosophic questions that I believe are of tantamount importance as they lay out questions that are at the heart of the human condition.

Let's consider the claim made famous by the French Existential Philosopher and Social Critic, Jean Paul Sartre. In most academic circles it is common knowledge that Sartre famously contends that, "Man is condemned to be free."²²⁵ Sartre premised this assertion on the idea that a human being ultimately has freedom, as he or she can, even as a captive, always elect to kill themselves. For Sartre, death is always a viable option out of one's circumstances. In contrast to this point made by Sartre, the African American Philosopher Angela Davis, in her seminal essay on Frederick Douglass, discusses the impact his first autobiography has long had Black literature. Davis' article entitled "Unfinished Lecture on Liberation Two"²²⁶ asserts the following:

Considering Africans' real experience of slavery on this continent, would you attempt to argue, like Sartre, that the Black was essentially free, since even in bondage a person still possess their freedom to choose between captivity and death? Or rather would we detect an incompatibility with this notion in that it neglects the prerequisites of liberation? Would you agree that when a slave chose death, the resulting elimination of the predicament of slavery also abolishes the fundamental condition of freedom that is the slave experience of freedom as a lived in reality? Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey met with death at the conclusion of slavery revolts they courageously led, but was it death that they chose or was a liberation for their people at the risk for them as individuals? The slave who grasped the real significance of freedom understands that it is not ultimately the ability to choose life over death as a slave, but rather the ability to strive toward abolition of the master slave relationship itself.²²⁷

225. Sartre, Jean, and John Kulka. *Existentialism Is A Humanism* (including, a commentary on *The Stranger*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

226. Davis, Angela Y., and Joy James. "Unfinished Lecture on Liberation." In *The Angela Y. Davis reader*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998.

227. Davis, "Unfinished Lecture

Frederick Douglass does a masterful job of demonstrating the importance of education and the tremendous obligation that it engenders as he speaks up in *being the Beast or the slinking serpents*. This clearly shows that the assertions of Sartre, and Europeans like him, is wrong when he puts forth the following:

The Silver Trump of freedom had roused my soul to wakefulness, freedom now appeared to disappear no more forever and was heard in every sound seen in every thought it was ever present to torment me with a sense of my wretched condition. I saw nothing without seeing it, heard nothing without hearing at. And felt nothing without feeling it. It looked from every star its mouth at every column breath and moved in every storm. I also found myself dreading my own existence in which myself did; and but for the mere hope of being free I'm no doubt that I should have killed myself or done something for which I should have surely been killed.²²⁸

In my estimation, education provided for Douglass the necessary condition to become conscious of not merely his surroundings, but also the very real obligation he had not to give his life away. This statement clearly is demonstrative of the point Angela Davis makes in her lectures, which accompany the 2009 edition²²⁹ of this classic text, though suicide might possibly be a legitimate form of escapism from conditions of material bondage, this is not to be conflated with being free. Douglass proves that Blacks wanted to be free and that freedom entailed for Black Folks the human experience of a lived human reality. In a similar vein, King David, author of the Psalms, states, "I would have surely fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."²³⁰

I use this scripture as it points to a most concrete theme in Black Philosophy in general and Black Educational Philosophy in particular. Douglass wants to attain literacy, as it, in his mind, would allow him to better understand the world with a hope to changing it. As a former

228. Douglass, *Narrative*.

229. Douglass, Frederick, and Angela Davis. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* A New Critical Edition by Angela Y. Davis. ed. San Francisco: City Lights Bookstore, 2010.

230. Psalms 27:13 NKJV.

slave, Douglass constructed his educational Philosophy to be one that had to be concretely rooted in the lived reality of the Black's condition. This is not to say that he, and to a larger extent Black Philosophy of Education, is not concerned with knowledge acquisition as its own end. He wants knowledge to be able to help one deliver the people from their real bondage to some extent. The image of the academic philosopher who is too far from the people as he is philosophizing about is a huge barrier to entry today, let alone in the historical epoch that Douglass was in. Both Douglas and Washington were themselves former slaves, Black and have historically seen education as freedom from bondage both literally and figuratively.

**You Must Ask the Wizard (of Tuskegee) for Some Heart
(and Whatever Else You Need)**

Booker T. Washington is perhaps the most influential African-American practitioner of power politics in the history of the United States. If one considers political influence broadly, political action we know involves more than the mere casting of individual ballots. Politics broadly considered is the enterprise of deciding who gets what, when, where, why, and how. It is with this broader definition of the political enterprise in mind that I make the previously mentioned assessment. Though Booker T. Washington is not the father of such ideology, he is certainly the most highly visible and perhaps most articulately adept proponent for and practitioner of the ideology that education is a means for material acquisition. In the canon of luminary African American thinkers, not many cast as wide a shadow as Booker T. Washington. This man amazingly held sway in both the Black and White worlds. This we know is a particularly difficult feat in any age, particularly in the epoch in which he came to prominence.

He held status amongst both African-Americans of the Agrarian South and also White Philanthropists of the Industrial North whose interests' one might naturally think are inherently antithetical. This is an amazing accomplishment in any day and age, but when one considers where Booker T. humbly began it is mind-boggling. In my view, it is with this in mind that W.E.B. Dubois famously asserted that Booker T. Washington was "the most influential southerner since Jefferson Davis."²³¹ Today, his seminal text *Up From Slavery*?²³² Still looms large in the minds of many African-Americans after more than a century since its initial publication. Booker T. Washington, in many respects, is what in common parlance is called an aviator; to put it rather crudely, when one speaks about the so-called "Wizard of Tuskegee," we must proceed with the greatest caution, as the mere mention of his name elicits strong responses. In a very concrete symbolic sense, Booker T. Washington has never left us ("Us" being those who are concerned with the systematic social plight of African Americans). Prior to penning this text for your perusal, I undertook a brief archival search of articles and books about Booker T. Washington. Amongst the numerous streets, schools, libraries, and people that bear his name, I found one very interesting text entitled *Booker T. Washington: Uncle Tom or New Negro*?²³³ Though it is not my intent to discuss this particular text here, I think it provides some probative value by asking what meaning can be garnered from such a dichotomous construction.

I would like to forward the proposition that one would never find a similarly titled article about a thinker like Marcus Garvey. To my knowledge, no one has ever asserted such a proposition about Malcolm X. In my estimation, a similarly titled text would elicit most certainly

231. Bois, W. E. B. *The souls of Black folk* (Dover Thrift Edition. New York: Dover, 1994.

232 Washington, Booker T., Fredrick Douglass, and W.E.B. Du Bois. *Three African-American Classics: Up from Slavery, The Souls of Black Folk and Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Dover ed. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Pub., 2007.

233. Carroll, Rebecca. *Uncle Tom or new Negro: African Americans reflect on Booker T. Washington and Up from slavery one hundred years later*. New York: Broadway Books/Harlem Moon, 2006.

unimaginable animus toward the author of said work from the wider Black world. If an article penned asked this question about Dr. King, it would perhaps become quickly jettisoned. I also firmly believe that one would never ever have such criticism raised about (the self-reluctant Black)²³⁴ W.E.B. Dubois. Why then does Booker T. Washington rouse such suspicion amongst so many? Though all of these previously mentioned individuals might have a wider fan base than does Booker T. Washington, in some respects they all in some manner confer with Washington. Consider if one briefly reviews the life of Marcus Garvey, we find a life replete with examples of his nigh godlike adoration for Washington.²³⁵ It is not mere hyperbole on my part to assert that the founder of the Black Star line worshiped at an altar called Booker T. Washington. Malcolm X, as the public face of the so-called Black Nationalist organization, the Nation of Islam, was an ardent believer in the precepts of Black Nationalism. Malcolm certainly adhered to Black advancement through collective uplift. This was because the Blacks, out of necessity, should build autonomous educational and capitalistic institutions, much like Washington called for in his day.²³⁶ My argument here is also anecdotal in nature; this phenomenon is so because I am a former member of the Nation of Islam, and I was taught by the nation's own propaganda that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad had a great deal of reverence for Mr. Booker T. Washington.²³⁷

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was not merely born educated and came to prominence for his social activism in the city where Washington uttered, "in all things purely social let us be

234. Grant, Colin. *Negro with a hat: the rise and fall of Marcus Garvey and his dream of Mother Africa*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2008.

235. Stein, Judith. *The world of Marcus Garvey: race and class in modern society*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986.

236 Harlan, Louis R., and Raymond Smock. *Booker T. Washington in perspective essays of Louis R. Harlan*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1988.

237. Muhammad, Elijah. *Message to the Blackman in America*. Chicago: Muhammad Mosque of Islam No. 2, 1965.

separate as the fingers of the hand.”²³⁸ Dr. King himself, for short time, did believe in a form of Black self-segregation much like Washington. His rationale was that it would allow African Americans to properly ready ourselves for more social inclusion into the larger White world.²³⁹

The great William Edward Burghardt Dubois despite, in my estimation, being the most intellectually gifted American in history, is nevertheless inexorably linked to Washington. The statement is of significant importance if one subscribes to the notion Cornel West, the distinguished scholar and former Harvard University Professor, put forward about the importance of Dubois to Black intellectual and political thought. In his seminal and lone essay on Dubois entitled “Black Strivings in a Twilight Civilization,”²⁴⁰ West forwards the following:

W.E.B. DuBois is the towering Black Scholar of the twentieth century. The scope of his interests and depths of his insights and sheer majesty of his prolific writings bespeak a level of genius unequaled among modern intellectuals of color. For those of us interested in the relation of White supremacy to modernity (African slavery in the New World and European imperial domination of most of the rest of the world) or consequence of the construct of race during the age of Europe (1492-1945). The scholarly and literary works of DuBois indispensable for those of us obsessed with alleviating Black social misery the political texts of DuBois an insightful and inspiring. In this sense DuBois is the brook of fire we must all pass.²⁴¹

Washington is minimally important for us today as he is inexorably linked to the so-called “brook of fire.” Consider the selections of *Up From Slavery*²⁴² under our analysis for this current course of study. If it pleases the reader, I would also like to assert that to a degree, we are still grappling with his famous educational debate with Washington. Some authors are so bold to even assert that Washington might have won this debate. Now certainly this assertion might not

238. Washington, Booker T. *Delivers the 1895 Atlanta Compromise Speech*. <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/39/>.

239. Dyson, Michael Eric. April 4, 1968: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death and how it changed America. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2008.

240. West, Cornel. "Black Strivings in a Twilight Civilization,"." In *The Cornel West reader*. New York,: Basic Civitas Books, 1999.

241. Ibid West, Cornel. "Black Strivings".

242. Carroll, *Uncle Tom*.

receive the most favorable reception for members of the modern Academy. Washington's lasting power and his probative value as an educational theorist might be best seen outside of the ivory tower. I would like to make use of a scholarly personal narrative experience to that might provide some probative value for the topic at hand.

I was walking home one day from downtown Champaign after ending a day in which I was reading voraciously for the academic enterprise being undertaken, when suddenly my mind was changed and I decided to take the bus. While I was waiting, a conversation was started with another African American male who was around my age. The following conversation ensued:

Melvin: Brother Kevin! How are you? I haven't seen you in quite a while. Are you still working over there at that restaurant on Green Street?

Kevin: Yeah, man, I am still over there at the restaurant. You know I've been very busy trying to get my house in order.

Melvin: True, family, quite true I think we're all trying to get our house in order, in one way or another!

Kevin: No, family, you misunderstand me. I mean I'm really trying to get my house in order. I just copped (that is to say purchased) a house. I and my girl just bought a crib over there close to First Street.

Melvin: For real, family? Congratulations! It's good to see you doing so well. I read a book once called *Being Black, Living in the Red: Race, Wealth, and Social Policy in America*²⁴³ by the sociologist Dalton Conley. He said that the home's the key to wealth accumulation. That is where we Black Folks sometimes miss the mark.

243. Conley, *Being Black*.

Kevin: I agree, man! I have never read that book; I might check it out one day. Man, I am so busy working and stacking my bread. Renting an apartment doesn't make any sense to me. Some folks always ask me how I and my girlfriend were able to get a house! Folks think that because a brother works at a Subway he is not intelligent. And like I said, man, folks don't know how long I've been staking my paper, family. I've always wanted to get a house so I've been saving consistently for years. I pay \$500 for my mortgage payment amount; that's what a lot of folks pay in rent, you know. I keep my grind on family; I do whatever I got to do to make a buck. On the low I cut hair. I get mine. I got a house and I never had to serve that work either.

Melvin: Man, family, I got to get it like you. Give me your work ethic; it is inspiring to me! Not to change the subject, family, from capital accumulation, but what's up with that sister you be working with? I think she be eyeing me on the low.

Kevin: You mean Pam? Family, you know she pushed that new limited edition Chrysler 300 black on black and she put LeBron's²⁴⁴ on that thing.

Melvin: She put LeBron James on that whip, the big boy 23 inch rims?

Kevin: She did put 23 inch rims and televisions in the head rest. I cannot front the car is off the chain, but the part that gets me, family, is she lives with her parents. She pays \$900 a month on a car payment and lives with her momma. That's crazy as hell to me, family.

Melvin: I agree wholeheartedly, family, you sure right, that's crazy. That reminds me of that song that E40 came out what a couple years ago when he said, "Why brothers can't be broke some time, sometimes is cool to false don't buy you an \$85,000 car before you buy a house."²⁴⁵ You know that "Player's Ball" cut?

244. 23 inch rims are in popular parlances called LeBron in reference to NBA basketball star's former number 23, which he wore in homage to Michel Jordan until he departed the Cleveland Cavaliers in the summer of 2010.

245. E40, "Rapper's Ball," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rapper's_Ball.

Kevin: That “Rapper’s Ball” song with Too Short, K.C., and Jo Jo? That cut was of the chain.

Melvin: I’m over at the University trying to avoid haters and hopefully get a PhD. I needed this talk like you just don’t know, family. Well, family, though I hate to break up this conversation, I got a bounce off; my bus is here. One love.

After this occurrence, I could not help but think of Booker T. Washington when I heard that Kevin’s coworker pays \$900 a month for a car in spite of the fact she still resides at the residence of her mother. Booker T. Washington provides us with some insights as to how unfortunate an occurrence this is when he says, “One of the saddest sights I ever saw was the placing of a \$300 Rosewood piano in a country school in the South that was located in the heart of the Black belt.”²⁴⁶

This occurrence was misguided in Washington’s estimation because the social circumstances that Black Folks found themselves were not such that piano lessons were, in his estimation, a productive use of the limited resources Black educational institutions had been allotted. Washington further illustrates the extent to which he thought the acquisition of a piano was foolhardy with the following:

In this Black belt community with a piano went four-fifths this of all the people own no land, many lived in rented one-room cabins. Many were in debt for food and supplies, many mortgage their crops for food and supplies on which to live, and not one had a bank account. In this case how much wiser it would have been had the girls been taught in that community sowing, intelligent and economical cooking, housekeeping something of dairying and horticulture. The boys should have been taught something of farming in connection with their common school education, instead of a waking and then the desire for a musical instrument, which resulted in their parent’s going into debt for a third rate piano or an organ. Before a home was purchased. Industrial lessons would have awakened, in this community desire for homes and would have given the people the ability to free themselves from industrial slavery to the extent that most of them would

246. Carroll, *Uncle Tom*,

soon have purchased homes. After the home and the necessities of life were supplied could come to piano. One piano lesson in the home one's own is worth more than 20 in a rented log cabin.²⁴⁷

My anecdote and the aforementioned passages by Washington are illustrative of the ultimate importance so because for Washington schooling must be rooted in a materialist functionalism, that is utilitarian. By this, I mean that Washington ardently believed that schooling must be used by the individual not in some aspirational way, but it must be rooted in the material reality, to put it rather crudely by the social circumstances of the present age. Closely connected to Washington's view of education is a form of subtle Black Nationalism. One could argue that Washington expounds a mild form of Black nationalism in that he believes that Blacks, if given educational access befitting our social standing, will achieve as other races have achieved despite being the progeny of utterly unique social circumstances. To further elaborate this point, consider this passage:

Let it be understood in every corner of the South among the Negro youth, at least, that knowledge will benefit except if it is pointed in the direction that bears upon the present needs of the race. In cities of the south like Atlanta, how many colored mechanical engineers are there, how many civil engineers are there, or how many machinists, how many architects, how many house decorators in the whole state of Georgia, where 80% of all colored people depend on agricultural work? How many men out there are well grounded in the principles and practices of scientific farming? Or dairy work or fruit culture or horticulture.²⁴⁸

In order to verify the extent to which Blacks needed the most practical forms of education, he provides us with a cautionary tale of misplaced knowledge, which I cite at length for its probative value:

Not very long ago I had a conversation with the young colored man who was a graduate of one of the most prominent universities in this country. The father of this man is comparatively ignorant but for hard work. And by the exercise of Common sense he has become owner of 2000 acres of land. He owns more than a score of horses, cows, mules,

247. Ibid.

248. Carroll, *Uncle Tom*,

and swine in large numbers and is considered a prosperous farmer. In college the son of this farmer has studied chemistry, botany, zoology, surveying, and political economy. I asked this man how many acres his father cultivated in cotton, how many in corn. With a far-off gaze up into the heavens, he answered that he did not know. When I asked him about the classification soils on his father's farm, he did not know. He did not know the number of horses, cows, or the breeds they were, and he seemed surprised that he would be asked such a question. It never seemed to enter his mind that on his father's farm was the place to make his chemistry, his mathematics, and his literature penetrate and reflect itself in every acre of land, every bushel, every bushel, and every cow.²⁴⁹

In the final analysis, one's judgment of Booker T. Washington might say more about that person doing the analysis than Booker T. himself. This phenomenon is because I think the merits of Washington are often underappreciated. The ingenuity of Washington is much harder in my view for academics to appreciate than the intellectual acumen of say Dubois. This text also shows the extent to which Booker T. Washington is cognizant of the extent to which his education plan is specifically targeted to the large number Blacks who are a rarity in workers in a particular region of the South. In our following assessment, Washington's educational policy is the office and view that we must ask the following questions. To what extent is the public face that Washington forwards representative of this sentiment, as he truly believed his own rhetoric in this regard?

Is he proud of the rhetoric of a man who is intimately aware of the fact that he is practicing a rather tenuous juggling act? This is so because Washington is fighting for better material conditions for Black Folks on the one hand and on the other hand he tried appeasing White racial fears that Black progress would not destabilize the White social order.

Dubois' major points of contention with Washington have been well documented. They are primarily as follows: It is Dubois' opinion that even if one agrees with Washington's assessment of Black necessity for the garnering the material wealth, one would still need a small

249. Ibid.

population of Negro scholars trained at institutions of higher learning even if their only utility was to instruct Black students. Secondly, Dubois sees Washington's stance in his Atlanta Compromise speech as a drastic departure from the stances taken by Frederick Douglass. By this I mean in the mind of Dubois, Washington's stance is, to use a highly gendered term, less manly. What is the purpose and utility of the educational pursuit for Blacks? How does it differ from and is similar to the pursuits of Whites? It is my deeply held view that any sustained and critical examination of that which relates to African Americans is incomplete if it does not confront the perpetual debate between the thoughts of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois.

In these two men, we see the prelude to every radical and conservative debate that was to follow. In my view, both of these men are Hegelian world figures who have shaped history as they were shaped by history. One was a Southerner who was born a slave; the other was an austere New Englander. This text approaches their schism in the following manner.

I construct the worldview of Dubois as an idealistic-intellectual aristocrat with utilitarian tendencies. This worldview has a drastically different orientation than that of Washington, who I construct as a materialistic-utilitarian pragmatist. Put crudely, one could assert that Dubois' thought centers on the concept of uplifting the soul of man, whereas Washington was concerned about material uplift. This text seeks to concentrate its criticism chiefly on W.E.B. Dubois.

And on the eighth day God created Dubois: primer on an intellectual Aristocrat of American and African descent

Many authorities have articulated agreement with Alfred North Whitehead's sentiment about the primary role Plato has played in the formulation of the Western intellectual tradition by suggesting that the whole of Philosophy is but a footnote to Plato.²⁵⁰ In fact Whitehead forwards:

So far as concerns Philosophy only a selected group can be explicitly mentioned. There is no point in endeavoring to force the interpretations of divergent philosophers into a vague agreement. What is important is that the scheme of interpretation here adopted can claim for each of its main positions the express authority of one, or the other, of some supreme master of thought—Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant. But ultimately nothing rests on authority; the final court of appeal is intrinsic reasonableness. The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato. I don't mean the systematic scheme of thought which schools have doubtfully have abstracted from his writings. I allude to the wealth of general ideas scattered through them his personal endowments, his wide opportunities for experience at a great period of civilization his inheritance of an intellectual tradition not yet stiffened by excessive systemization have made his writing an inexhaustible mine of suggestion.²⁵¹

It is my view this phenomenon is so because Plato was a Hegelian historical figure for the following two reasons. First Plato's work is the personifying example of the Socratic Method. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Plato is the only thinker who could properly bridge the gap between Socrates (the super-idealist) and Aristotle (the thoughtful author) must be wary of overemphasizing the subject to be analyzed strengths. This position must be undertaken to not de-emphasize his or her weakness as well. Unquestionably in most academic Philosophy circles, Plato is the most historical intellect in the Western tradition. The lauding of mere superlatives on Plato is warranted, yet still is not sufficient to articulate his importance. Plato was not both man and divine (he was merely man) and as such made manly mistakes. Plato bases his primary assumptions and his views of humanity are intimately connected to the fact that he was an

250. Whitehead, Alfred North, and David Ray Griffin. *Process and reality: an essay in cosmology*. Corrected ed. New York: Free Press, 1978

251. A type of canonical bias that has effects on the recurrence and retention of Blacks is shown in Whitehead's quote.. We will discuss this in Chapter 3.

Athenian intellectual aristocrat. The city-state of Athens was based in theory on ideals of freedom, liberty, and equal access to the best of life.

It is my view that closer examination of historical records reveals that there was, in fact, tremendous distance between values espoused by Athenian ideology and the Athenian social reality. This was so because the overwhelming preponderance of the city's population was in fact slaves (some estimates speculate that an upwards of 80% were slaves or occupied a station analogous to it). And we certainly now know that Plato has strict categories of people and race were a central feature of the Athens of his day.²⁵²

What does calling Plato an intellectual aristocrat mean? It is my view that in Plato's discussions of classes of people, he clearly believes in the natural inequality or inabilities of certain categories of humans. He might be seen as a Weak Racists in this regard. This inequality takes shape in both the intellectual and physical realms. It is the rationale that Plato puts forth his classes of people in which he identifies by relating them to categories of medal (i.e., gold, silver, and bronze).²⁵³

William Edward Burghardt Dubois was in life like Plato, an intellectual aristocrat. The elitism of Dubois' *Talented Tenth*²⁵⁴ can be seen as being drawn from his grounding in the preoccupation with both classical and enlightenment thinking. It is in this view that I would like to suggest may be possible to view Dubois' *Talented Tenth*, and to a lesser extent his revision of it with the 1948 "Guiding 100th," which was delivered to the conclave of Sigma Pi Phi (an organization whose motto is "Extraordinary Men, Sharing Health, Wealth and Wisdom"²⁵⁵) with

252. Kamtekar, Rachana, Julie K. Ward, and Tommy Lott. "Distinction Without a Difference? Race and Genos in Plato." In *Philosophers on race: critical essays*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002.

253. Kamtekar, *Distinction*.

254. Bois, W. E. B. *The talented tenth*. [1st electronic ed. New York: James Pott and Co., 1903.

255. Sigma Pi Phi website, accessed <http://www.sigmapiphi.org/home/>.

the same lens that one uses when reading Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*. I view Plato and Socrates both as intellectual aristocrats who ardently believed that only a few were innately meant to govern or lead the polis. Similarly, Dubois thought only a few could pull up the masses of backward Black people. Cornel West, the distinguished philosopher and former university professor at Harvard University, put forward the following about the importance of Dubois to the creation of Black thought, be it social, political, educational, economic, and religious. I cite this at length for the explanatory and probative value it gives.

W.E.B. Dubois is the towering Black Scholar of the twentieth century. The scope of his interests and depths of his insights and sheer majesty of his prolific writings bespeak a level of genius unequalled among modern intellectuals of color. Yet like all of us Dubois was a child of his age. He was shaped the prevailing presuppositions and modern prejudices of modern Euro-American civilization. And despite his life long struggle marked by great courage and sacrifice against White supremacy and for the advancement of Africans around the world he was in style and his substance a proud Black man of letters primarily influenced by late 19th century Euro-American traditions. For those of us interested in the relation of White supremacy to modernity (African slavery in the New World and European imperial domination of most of the rest of the world) or consequence of the construct of race during the age of Europe (1492-1945). The scholarly and literary works of Dubois are indispensable for those of us obsessed with alleviating Black social misery. The political texts of Dubois are insightful and inspiring. In this sense Dubois is the brook of fire we must all pass.²⁵⁶

Clearly the following statements made by West attest to the exceptional intellect of Dubois. It is with certainty that absent Jim Crow exclusionary practices, Dubois would have also attained the noteworthy positions that a scholar like West has (in fact West implicitly says this). West's introduction, as he puts, is his only sustained attempt at interpreting Dubois entitled "Black Strivings in Twilight Civilization" provides tremendous explanatory value to help us begin to unravel the intellectual aristocrat ideals of Dubois. Consider the following introduction by West:

256. West, *Black Strivings*

If all my writings had to disappear this essay (i.e., Black strivings in twilight civilization) is the one piece I hope would survive. Its fundamental point of the basic humanity of Black peoples continuous with that of others and DuBois's life long effort to convince the rest of the world of this basic truth are the core of my work and life. Needless to say this essay is my first and only sustained encounter with the greatest of all Black intellectuals-DuBois. Yet he and I are birds of very different feathers. My freestyle California spirit stands in stark contrast to his austere New England soul. My Chekhovian Christian sensibilities rooted in gut-bucket blues and jazz dispositions violently clash with his enlightenment and Victorian sentiments based on Frisk, Harvard, Berlin, Atlanta, and New York experiences. To put it bluntly, I am much closer (and proudly so) to the funk of James Brown or George Clinton, the soul of Curtis Mayfield, Richard Pryor or Aretha Franklin than he. Yet we remain soul mates in our struggle for oppressed peoples especially Black Humanity .²⁵⁷

It is my view that historically, the pursuit and accruing of education has been a chief means of social legitimization and mobility for individuals with limited access to other forms of social capital. Education at elite institutions of higher learning has provided much agency for marginalized Blacks to move up to higher echelons of social strata. Today even as Blacks have and will continue to make historical inroads in the American higher educational system, it is stills a rarity for a Black Person to have the educational accomplishments of either a West or a Dubois. Dubois, of course, is the first Black to earn a PhD from Harvard. Consider this along with his other accomplishments at the time in our country's history; that these feats were accomplished again bespeak to the rarity of intellect Dubois possessed.

How is it that a man who possesses a bachelor's degree from Harvard and a doctorate in Philosophy from Princeton, as West does, and still asserts that he maintains ties that are far closer to Black life than did Dubois? Also consider that Dubois came of age and died in the age of Jim Crow and much more overt racial hostilities than West. I would like to make the assertion that since Dubois was an intellectual aristocrat, who put more viability and credence in Euro-

257. West, Black Strivings

enlightened culture than his own, he was by and large incapable of understanding the plight of Blacks in the way most Blacks of his epoch understood it. The relationship between Dubois and Blacks was always a tenuous one. It is my view that Dubois felt neglected by both Blacks and Whites whom he felt needed his leadership but failed to take it. I view Dubois' defection to Ghana as radically different than, say, Socrates' rationale in the *Crito*.²⁵⁸ Plato's dialogue the *Crito* is a conversation that Crito has with Socrates concerning this possibility of Socrates escaping his prison cell so that he may be freed from the next day's impending death. Socrates retorts in the following manner:

Has a philosopher like you failed to discover that our country is more to be valued and higher and holier than mother or father or any ancestor and more to be regarded? In the eyes of the Gods and of men of understanding also to soothed, gently and reverently entreated when angry even more then and if persuaded obeyed? And when we are punished by her whether by imprisonment or stripes, the punishment is to be endured in silence and if she lead us to wounds or death in battle thither we follow as is; whether anyone may yield or retreat or leave his rank but whether in battle or in a court of law or in other place he must do what his city and country command him to or he must change their view of what is just: and if he may do no violence to his father or mother much less he may do no violence to his country.²⁵⁹

Put bluntly, Socrates asserts that we are in many respects the progeny of our country. Seen in this light, it is reasonable to have allegiance to one's country even if that country does not give allegiance to one's self. If Socrates makes it clear that right or wrong, one's allegiance should be one's country and its men of understanding, how can we justify Dubois' departure from his land? In light of the allegory of the cave (i.e., the one who should defect must stay), W.E.B. Dubois, the intellectual, had internalized American ideals of liberalism and progress. West states the following in regards to Dubois' American optimism:

19. 258 Jowett, Benjamin. "Plato, *Crito*." In *The republic and other works of Plato*, Garden City, N.Y.: International Collectors Library,

259. Plato, *Crito*,

In this sense in his early and middle years he was not only a progressivism but also a kind of American exceptionalist. It must be said to be sure that unlike most American exceptionalist of his day he considered the color line the litmus test for the country he remained optimistic about a multiracial democratic America. DuBois deeply held belief in the possibility of America coupled with his idealism caused him to be unable to understand or articulate truly Black Nationalist agenda. In this regard West states the following Dubois never fully understood the pessimistic view of American democracy behind the Garvey movement. In fact he never fully understood nor appreciated the strong—though not centennial—Black Nationalist strain in the Black freedom movement. He could never bring himself to identify intimately with the harsh words of Josephine Baker who noted in response to the East St. Louis riot of July 1917 which left over 200 dead Black people and over 6,000 homeless. “The very idea of American makes me shake and tremble and gives me nightmares”; Even when DuBois left for Africa in 1961 as a member of Moribund Communist Party his attitude toward America was not that of an Elijah Muhammad or a Malcolm X. He was still in a significant disappointment with America and there is no disappointment without a sense of a dream deferred. Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X were not disappointed with America as bonafide Black Nationalist; they had no expectations of a White supremacist civilization: they adhered neither to American optimism nor exceptionalism.²⁶⁰

As previously stated, Dubois, like us all, was a product of his age. It is in this that I assert that Dubois was unable to immerse himself fully in Black culture. This phenomenon was so because he could not abandon a deep rationalistic self-loathing for Black people. Dubois may have internalized the highbrow racism of educated White elites. It is highly likely that Dubois was constantly bombarded at Harvard and Berlin with highbrow racism that presented itself in the form of comments like “William, you’re not like the others,”²⁶¹ or perhaps even more

260. West, *Strivings*,

261. I do not fancy myself unique in this regard and I think many Black folks who have sustained and had deeper than surface level interactions with non-Blacks have had this occurrence, which might be thought to be microaggressive behavior. The intent of this statement is meant to be laudatory. The statement means generally that the person being lauded doesn’t evoke the stereotypical behavior or interest that is commonly associated with the group to which they belong. I have been told on several occasions that because I am well read, and love cigars, and study philosophy that I am not the typical Black person. I would imagine some women experience a similar phenomenon when they are alleged to be just one of the guys or if a woman is said to think like a man.

disconcerting “William, I don’t even see you as Black.”²⁶² Secondly, it can be inferred from Dubois’ writings that he argues for his elitism on “rational grounds.”²⁶³

This phenomenon is so because he believed the educated and trained represented the best of that which was (and is) Black. In this the majority of Blacks who were part of the southern underclass should defer leadership to northern Black intellectual elite. It is these individuals whom Dubois said had the following “Honesty of heart and purity of motive.”²⁶⁴

In my view this can be seen as a clear swipe at Washington, whose Tuskegee Institute clearly lacked this purity of motive and honesty of heart. I would argue that central to Dubois is the pull of the White world and of the tragic need for White recognition and affirmation. The concern of the veil and double consciousness comes to the forefront of my perspective out of a sense being rejected by the White world. Eric J. Sundquist, editor of the Oxford Dubois Reader, asserts about Dubois’ thinking in the following: “From the outset Dubois’ famous conception of double consciousness opened him to accusations of Eurocentrism.”²⁶⁵

The educated Dubois sought an ideal culture beyond the color line, where as a famous passage puts it “wed with truth.” “He could dwell above the veil, sit with Shakespeare, move an arm with Balzac and Dumas, and summon Aristotle and Aurleius all to meet him graciously with no scorn or condescension.”²⁶⁶

The preceding passage is instructive in that it not only shows who some of Dubois’ intellectual heroes are, but also implies that Dubois considered himself on par with the likes of

262. Naomi, Tutu, “I Don’t Think of You as Black,” *Linkage Leader*, accessed April 26, 2013, http://www.linkageinc.com/thinking/linkageleader/Documents/Naomi_Tutu_Rose_Bator_I_Don't_Think_of_You_As_Black_10.

263. Rabaka, Reiland. *Du Bois's dialectics: Black radical politics and the reconstruction of critical social theory*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008.

264. Sundquist, Eric, and WEB Dubois. *The Oxford W.E.B. Dubois Reader*. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1996.

265. Sundquist, *Oxford*,

266. Sundquist, ,W.E.B. Dubois Reader,

Shakespeare. Why would an obviously gifted person like Dubois have an intellectual elitism that is problematic? To put it crudely, Dubois' intellectual elitism is problematic because he was in fact a person whose intellect and mastery of language put him in the rarefied air that Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, and Shakespeare inhabited. In my view, Dubois' tension, a conception of double consciousness, comes from his realization that he is associated with a race of individuals of whom it was believed were incapable of producing an intellect such as his. Seen in this light Dubois might be constructed as the example that proves this unwritten but very real rule.

If one considers Dubois to be one of the world's historical figures in the intellectual realm, as I do, then the question must be asked, "What is the real reason for the talented tenth?"

Sundquist puts forward the following, "Dubois was fascinated by personal force and epoch meaning of representative men."²⁶⁷ Bismarck, Goethe, Toussaint L'Overture, Abraham Lincoln, and even Jefferson Davis elicited Dubois' ecumenical admiration for their capacity to express the defying of cultures for which they stood. Sundquist states,

As president of the confederacy, Jefferson Davis in particular might seem as a counter intuitive choice for a Dubois study, but Jefferson Davis was a figure that Dubois might reveal the moral obtuseness and refined brutality of the South. At the same time however Davis le Bismarck in Dubois's eyes was the incarnation of his region's stalwart manhood and heroic character. By Dubois' estimation such figures were exponent of racial spirit, bridging the distance the distance between the timeless mystique of racialism and pragmatic action within the real time of history.²⁶⁸

Dubois articulates the meaning of representative men in the following: "We are Pharaohs, Caesars, Toussaint's, and Napoleons of history and forget that vast races of which they were but epitomized expressions."²⁶⁹ This insightful passage moves the question of race in the Black

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Sundquist, , W.E.B. Dubois Reader,

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

Nationalist direction, projects Dubois's notion of the talented tenth that will lead the Black race forward, and places him as the leading contributor of slave thought and practice.

Sundquist further states,

To be epitomized expression of African Americans would not over ideal, but rather contain the vital conflicts of double consciousness. As the epitome of his race DuBois sets himself the formidable task of representing not just African Americans but the implication of the whole vast family of African, what Marcus Garvey would later appropriately refer to as scattered Ethiopia as though it were an integral part of his own self.²⁷⁰

Dubois, in the preceding passage as Sundquist asserts, in his own mind was the "chosen one." He is our representative man. Thus, the longing for Blacks to be seen as both Black and Americans is a tension that all Blacks have because Dubois has it. This becomes problematic if one considers that Dubois not merely implies that he is not only a member of the talented tenth, but he *is* the talented tenth (and the rest of Black Humanity) congealed. In this, I believe that question should be asked, did Dubois fight for Blacks because he harbored the love of his people or was his protest rooted in a sense of condescending altruism. In my view, it would not be hard to imagine that Dubois may have thought that the actions of Washington at Tuskegee or other regions in the south foolish, because obviously if Whites did not want him they could not possibly want other Blacks. (After all, was he not the embodiment of the racial zeitgeist? He was the great Dubois.) It is my view that all modern day African American intellectual heritage and history all flow from a river called Dubois.

One of Dubois' works stands above all others. *The Souls of Black Folk* is to Americans of African descents' intellectual heritage as the Bible is to the spiritual development of Black Folks. Souls provides a critical introduction to his early worldview and though he modified some over

270. Ibid.

the course of Dubois' life, he, in my view, always remained true to the passionate conviction of his idealism and elitism that is clear in *Souls*.

I will attempt to analyze the thoughts of Dubois by focusing my primary attention on the following: Dubois' idealism about the purpose of education and secondly Dubois' criticism of Booker T. Washington. Dubois begins his chapter on Atlanta with the following, "South of the North, yet north of the South is a city of a hundred hills peering out from the shadows of the past into the promise of the future."²⁷¹ It is ironic and nearly prophetic of Dubois to utter his words more than 100 years ago. Did Dubois foresee Blacks migrating back to the South in record numbers? Did the visionary Dubois see in 1903 that in 1996 Atlanta would be centrally located on the world stage because of the Olympics? Did Dubois have an understanding of the importance that Atlanta's pop-culture impact would have? In our present day and age, Atlanta is known as a progressive city with a progressive agenda. I would contend that the current crush than many younger Blacks have on Atlanta in many respects has revived Black preoccupation with the South. In fact according to a recent issue of *Black Enterprise Magazine*, the top ten cities for Black Americans to live are as follows: Washington DC, the triangle (Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill), Houston, Nashville, Dallas, Charlotte, Indianapolis, Columbus, Ohio, and Atlanta.²⁷²

In Dubois' day, Atlanta may have been known as the jewel of the cotton kingdom; one would have readily been able to find a Georgia peach (i.e., the agricultural product). Today Atlanta's primary exports of the world are cultural more so than agricultural. Atlanta is popularly known today for its high preponderance of Waffle House restaurants, strip clubs, and rappers.

271. Sundquist, W.E.B. Dubois Reader,

272. "Top 10 CITIES FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS 2007 Our Readers and Editors Select the Best Places in which to Live, Work, and Play," Black Enterprise, , <http://www.blackenterprise.com/mag/top-10-cities-for-african-americans-2007/>.

Even today there is colloquium amongst Atlanta's Blacks that Atlanta is a mere ten miles away from the South. This saying affirms in my view the notion that Dubois expressed when he states that Atlanta is "south of the North yet north of the South." The city of a hundred hills peering from the shadows of the past to the promise of the future has a certain extent been an oasis of opportunity for Blacks to pursue that ever elusive American dream. To put it simply, when Dubois states that Atlanta is south of the North and yet north of the South, I take this to mean that only in Atlanta is their potential to save the backward South and backward Southerners who are both Black and White alike.

In this chapter of *Souls*, Dubois' idealism about uplifting the soul becomes apparent. Dubois gives insight to his grounding in ancient Greek mythology when he asserts that if Atlanta was not named for the goddess Atlanta, she should have been. He asserts the following:

Atlanta is not the first or last maiden whom greed of gold has led to befoul the temple of love; and not maids alone but men in the race for life, sink from the high and generous ideals of youth to the gamblers code of bourse and in all of our nations strivings is not the gospel of work defiled by the gospel of pay. So common is this that one half thinking is normal: so unquestioned that we almost fear to question the end of racing is not gold if the aim of man is not rightly to be rich and if this is the fault of America how dire a danger lies before a new land and a new city least Atlanta stooping for mere gold shall find that gold accursed!²⁷³

Consider this in connection to the following when Dubois further reveals the idealistic preoccupation with "uplift" by stating the following,

Atlanta must not think that golden apples are the goal of racing but mere incidents along the way. Atlanta must not lead the south to dream of material prosperity as the touch stone of all success; already the fatality might of this idea is beginning to spread it is replacing the finer type of southerner with vulgar money getters; it is burying the sweeter beauties of ostentation. For every social ill the panacea of wealth has been urged: wealth to overthrow the remains of slave feudalism; wealth to raise the "cracker" third estate wealth to employ the Black serfs and the

273. W.E.B. Dubois, "Of the Wings of Atlanta," in *The Souls of Black Folk* (Charleston: Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, 1903), <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/DubSoul.htm>.

prospect of wealth to keep them working wealth as the end and the aim of politics and as legal tender for law and order and goodness wealth as the ideal of the public school.²⁷⁴

This statement by Dubois is seen by me as both in form and function a Socratic admonishment on Dubois' part. Plato's apology presents the defense of Plato's hero Socrates in front of the 500 Athenian jurors who will decide his fate. In this dialogue Socrates warns of the problematic nature of valuing things that are material. Socrates puts forth the following:

Men of I honor you and love you but I shall obey God rather than you and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practicing and teaching of Philosophy exhorting anyone I meet after my manner convincing him saying my friend why are you a citizen in of a great and mighty wise city of Athens care so much about laying up the honor and reputation and so little about wisdom, truth and the greatest improvement of your soul which you never regard nor heed at all. Are you not ashamed of this? And if the person with whom I am arguing says: yes but I do care; I do not depart or let him go at once, interrogate and examine him, and if I think he has no virtue but only says he has reproach him with undervaluing the greater and overvaluing the less. And this I should say to everyone I meet young or old citizen or alien but especially the citizens in so much as they are brethren. For this is the command to the God as I would have you know; and I believe that to this day no greater good has ever happened in the state than my service to the God. For I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike not to take thought for your persons or property but first and to chiefly about the greatest improvement of the soul. I tell you that virtue is not given by money but from virtue come money and every other good of man, public as well as private.²⁷⁵

Both Dubois and Socrates find that the pursuit of the material as men's sole reason for existence to be tremendously constricted. The idealist considers the material to only be the symbolic indicator of something higher (i.e., the ideal world). It is also no mere coincidence that both these men acknowledge the implicit greatness of their nation when they take it to task. Socrates does not want to destroy his beloved Athens; he merely wants to realize its capacity to become a great nation absent the triviality of the "paper chase." In a similar manner, it is my

274. Bois, W. E. B., and Farah Jasmine Griffin. "Of the wings of Atlanta." In *The souls of Black folk*. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2005.

275. Plato, "Apology" in *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito*, ed. F.J. Church (New York: Classic Books America, 2009).

view that Dubois' longing to be both Black and American comes to the forefront of his thought because Dubois sees the dormant ability in his nation. Dubois wants America to live up to its proclaimed values and civil religion.

Rare, is my view, is the keenly aware individual like Dubois who would really acknowledge the primacy that American civil religion (i.e., the belief in American exceptionalism) plays as an obstacle to scathing critical examination of the plight of the American underclass. Most individuals amongst our ranks, we Americans (even those who identify ourselves as outsiders) have wholeheartedly accepted the values of this most dominant of ideologies. To deny the effectiveness of our collective internalization and inoculation of these values would in reality deny our attempt of our complicity to and with these values. It is my view that this denial would be an attempt on our parts to absolve ourselves from our inaction as it relates to our ideological perceptions and the drastic distinctions between our social realities. In a historical sense, America provided an opportunity for certain segments of the population. If they had a positionality of being White, these downtrodden immigrants rise from their most humble of positions help to buy the American ideals of which I have previously spoken.

Dubois astutely put forward the following relating to a central issue in the American love of gold and false belief in meritocracy:

Instead of truth, beauty and goodness wealth as the ideal public school, not only is this true in the world that Atlanta typifies but it is threading to become true of a world the Black world beyond the veil. Today it makes little difference to Atlanta; to the south what the Negro thinks dreams or wills. In the soul life of the land of today and naturally will grow and long remain unthought-of half-forgotten and yet when he does come to think for himself and yet when he does come to think will and do for himself and let no man dream that day will never come.²⁷⁶

276. Dubois, "Wings," in *Souls*,

African Americans, Native Americans, and other groups of color have a history of marginalization and exclusion; it is these groups who hold very firmly to the mythology of America as a meritocracy. It is only because the underclass so thoroughly believes in American concepts of industry and self-evaluation that our society remains functional. To this end, Roxanne Dunbar puts forward the following that refutes Dubois: "Let no man pray that day will never come."²⁷⁷ Dunbar states:

We dress of colonialism these who did and do not make it being the majority in the United States are potentially dangerous to the ruling class we are proof positive of the lie of the American dream. However self-blame, a sprinkling of White skin privilege with license and serving as cops and in the military (give them a gun and point to the enemy) conspire to neutralize or redirect our anger. But above all it is that dream and ideology that sacred myth of origin the religion of Americanism which keeps us drugs and cheap consumer items especially sex and violence but without the dreamy ideology none of the other tricks would work.²⁷⁸

This sentiment of Dunbar finds a home in souls in that Dubois' book and life constantly confronted the contradictions of America. Dubois and Dunbar both speak to the problems that arise when the "outsider" or "other" tries to find inclusion into this powerfully destructive dream than presently is even more elusive than it has been. The questions at the center of soul's fundamental challenge, the fundamental conceptions of what we Americans believe to be truth. Dubois' idealism about schooling becomes clear when he articulates the higher values in the following:

Patience, humility, manners, and taste common schools and kindergarten, industrial and technical schools literature and tolerance, all these spring from knowledge and culture. The children of the university so must men and nations build not otherwise not upside down. Teach workers to work- a wise saying; wise when applied to German boys and American girls. Wiser when said of Negro boys for they have less knowledge of working and none to teach them. Teach

277. Ibid.

278. Dunbar, Roxanne, Matt Wray, and Annalee Newitz. "Bloody Footprints: Reflections on Growing up Poor White," In *White trash: race and class in America*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

thinkers to think a needed knowledge in a day of loose careless logic and they whose lot is the gravest must have the most careful training to think airtight. If these things are so how foolish to ask what is the best education for one of seven or sixty million souls, shall we teach them trades or train them in liberal arts. Neither and both: teach workers to work and the thinkers to think. Make carpenters of carpenters and philosophers of philosophers and fops of fools nor can we pause her. We are training not isolated men but a living group of men, and the final product of our training must be neither psychologist nor brick mason but a man and to make men we must have ideals, broad, pure, inspiring ends of living, not sordid money getting, not apples of gold, the worker must work for the glory of his handiwork not simply for pay, the thinker must think for truth, not for fame. And all this is only gained by human strife and long buffering by ceaseless training and education by the right of rightness and truth on the unhampered search for truth.²⁷⁹

Dubois, in the previous passage, shows his enlightened thinking in that he is arguing for the pursuit of education absent any consideration of the pecuniary gain one could garner from said pursuit. Dubois is making an argument that has and will continue to be dominant in western society, in that the just and or good society is the society that everyone is doing to the best of their ability what they are best suited to do. In my view, Dubois is arguing for the South in general and Atlanta in particular to provide Blacks with the educational system that would draw Blacks from “becoming” to “being.” Plato corroborates Dubois with the following, “Yes I said and now having spoken of it I must add how charming the science of education is! And in how many ways it conduces to our desired end if pursued in the spirit if philosopher and not a shopkeeper!”²⁸⁰ Dubois, like Socrates, was a philosopher in that both loved wisdom and were compelled to the truth as metal is compelled to a magnet. Dubois, through actions and writings, reveals a very Socratic strain in that both put a premium on reason. This notion provides one of my key criticisms of Dubois and his relationship to the majority of the Black population.

279. Dubois, “Wings,” in *Souls*,

280. Dubois, “Wings,” in *Souls*,

Cornel West puts forward the following in regard to the rational elitism of Dubois suggesting the following:

Dubois' inability to immerse himself in Black everyday life precluded his access to the distinctive Black traumatic sense and Black encounter with the absurd. He certainly saw, analyzed and empathized with Black sadness, sorrow, and suffering. But he didn't feel it in his bones deeply enough nor was he intellectually open enough to position himself alongside the sorrowful suffering, yet striving ordinary Black folk. Instead own personal and intellectual distance lifted him above them as he addressed their plight, in his progressive writings. Dubois was never alienated; he lived with them in Black communities where he received great respect and admiration. But there seemed to be something in him that alienated Black people. In short he was reluctant to learn fundamental lessons about life and about himself from them. Such lessons would have required that he at least momentarily believe that they were or might be as wise as he and this he could not do. Dubois' enlightenment worldview—his foundation—profited this kind of understanding. Instead he adopted a mild elitism that underestimated the capacity of everyday Black people to know about life. In the talented tenth he claims knowledge of life and its wider meaning has been the point of the Negroes deepest ignorance. In his classic work *The Souls of Black Folks* there are eighteen references to Black backward and ungraceful folk including a statement of his intent to scatter civilization among a people whose ignorance was not of letters but of life itself.²⁸¹

This passage by West clearly articulates that Dubois was to some extent very estranged from American Blacks. Put simply, Dubois was with us (i.e., Blacks) but certainly not of us; Dubois' obvious contempt for Black institutions is troubling in that if he who is amongst our best and brightest has disdain for us, what is the implication for the larger White world? I assert that Dubois, like Socrates, wanted to get those people whom were his citizens (broadly defined to mean individuals with whom one shares relational ties) to free themselves from the dogmatic and sensuous thinking of the masses. This self-critical act would allow one to be in community with the greats of the past in the realm of reason. Since West alludes to Dubois' inability to understand the absurdity of both the human condition in general and the Black condition in particular, the question must be asked, did Dubois ever cry? I ask this question because it is only

281. West, *Black Strivings*,

irrationality (i.e., emotional driven) act of crying that one becomes human. Cornel West puts his pen on the pulse of his sentiment when he said, “It is not clear in any account that the great Socrates ever cried. Even in the Phadeo (where Socrates drinks the hemlock) there are no reports of his tears. It is my humble view that if Socrates never cried then he never loved and if one has never loved then one has never lived.”²⁸² In the previous statement, West puts forward a very controversial notion that the so-called “martyr” of Philosophy life and accomplishments were substantively meaningless absent the simple uncalculated act of weeping. It is with this sentiment in mind that I would suggest that if the martyr of Philosophy’s life were meaningless absent tears, Dubois’ life would similarly be so. I further take issue with Dubois’ disdain for common Black Folks and Black Institutions. It is striking to me that he who was clearly gifted was not astute enough to feign “Socratic Ignorance” (i.e., “all I know is that I know nothing”). It is tragic that the most exemplary Black Scholar of his and this generation was unwilling to become acquainted with the two most powerful intellectual traditions of the vast majority of his brethren.

It is my view that one cannot properly understand the Black experience in this country absent a critical encounter with the Black communities’ most important institution, the Black Church. This phenomenon is so because the two greatest Black intellectual traditions reach their most redemptive, reconciliatory and revolutionary possibilities in the Black Church, broadly defined this institution has produced a by far greater preponderance of heroes, heroines, cultural creators, innovators, liberators and interpreters of Black experience than all other institutions combined. It is in this construction that the Black Church takes on a role that is far greater than that of a simple place of worship. West suggests the following about the two most evolved forms of Black intellectual activity:

282. This rhetorical flourish is known by anyone who has spent any reasonable amount of time watching Cornel West lecture.

I would suggest that there are two organic intellectual traditions in the lives of African Americans. The Black Christian tradition of preaching and the Black musical tradition of performance; both traditions though undoubtedly linked to the life if the mind are oral improvisational and historic. Both traditions are rooted in Black life and possess precisely what the literature forms of Black intellectual life lack: institutional matrices overtime and space which there are accepted rules and procedures, criteria for judgment cannons for assessing performance models of past achievement and present emulation and knowledge succession and accumulation of superb accomplishments. The richness diversity and vitality of the traditions of Black preaching and Black music stand in strong contrast to the paucity even poverty of Black literate intellectual production. There simply has been no Black literate intellectuals who have mastered their craft commensurate with the achievement of Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker or Reverend Manuel Scott—just as there is no Black literature today comparable to Miles Davis, Sarah Vaughn or Reverend Gardner Taylor. This is not as because there has been no or are no first rate Black intellectuals but rather because without strong institutional channels to sustain tradition great achievement is impossible. And to be honest Black America has yet to produce a great literate intellectual with the sole exception of Toni Morrison. There indeed have super ones: DuBois, Frazier, Ellison, Baldwin, Hurston and many good ones but none can compare to the heights achieved by Black preachers and especially musicians.²⁸³

Dubois's failure to comprehend both the diversity of Black experience and its primary place of production of this experience is not only limited by Dubois' obvious elitism but also the fact that the greatest of all Negro intellectuals was a New Englander. Historically speaking it is a very recent phenomenon that Blacks have in any number statistical significant population outside of the South. Dubois grew up as a relatively (to the Black community) privileged New Englander. In my view, this is significant because he could not truly comprehend the strange racial and religious relational bonds between southern Whites and Blacks alike. Hate like love is sentiment, personal and contextually specific. Since races are social categories constructed by man as a means of differentiation, it is important in my view to discuss the "in it/not in it" dynamic southern racism was meant to keep Blacks in their social, political, and economic places. This point is clear in that the White fear is premised on fear of competition. White racism

283. West, Cornel. "The Dilemma of the Black Intellectual,". In The Cornel West reader. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999.

in the South was specifically targeted for southern Blacks. This is not to assert that a northern Black Person who journeyed south was saved from degradation, harassment or any other dreaded punishment. I am articulating that in order for one to understand southern racism and the ability to most effectively combat it, one must be its target. For example, James Anderson, Professor of History and Chairman of the Department of Educational Policy and Educational Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,²⁸⁴ puts forward the following: Once as a dark-skinned Alabama teenager, he and an equally dark friend were on the bus conversing with each other, sharing jovial banter amongst themselves, in the manner that teenagers do. A White man got on the bus and spilled his soda on his friend by accident; it was upon suffering this indignation that Anderson's companion verbally lambasted the White perpetrator of this act.

Upon hearing Anderson's associate's accent, he (i.e., of act incessantly) apologized to Anderson's companion. In reflection upon this, even Anderson speculates that this phenomenon was so because his friend had a Nigerian accent. Although as dark if not darker than Anderson, he was not "in it." This reaction of recompense changed drastically upon the White in question hearing Anderson's down home Alabama drawl. Although both men were very dark, Anderson as a southern Black witnessing a White man being put into his place was arduous to a White southern sensibility. Anderson was "in it" (i.e., a target of Southern hate) whereas his compatriot, being from foreign soil was marked in a social category that for degradation, but occupied a slightly unknown social strata that Anderson and other southern Blacks were not privy to. This phenomenon is so because it is assumed that the native Southern Black has a thorough understanding of the rules. Historically, the Black community has maintained an ardent belief in drawing the distinctions between the sacred and the secular. Compartmentalizations such as this

284. James Anderson, interview by Wanda Pillow, n.d.

may have been unfathomable to Dubois. To put it bluntly, Dubois' idealism put him in a precarious position: He could not grasp the two most poignant forms of Black cathartic activity. To borrow a phrase from James Cone, there are "risks associated with faith."²⁸⁵ Cone asserts the primacy of Black faith in the following:

There were no atheistic [or agnostics] in the cotton belt, as the Black section of Bearden was called, no proclamations of Nietzsche god is dead Philosophy and none of Friedrich Scheiermacher's cultural disperses of religion. The closest thing to Nietzsche atheist and Scheiermacher's cultural disperses of religion were the blues people who drank corn whiskey and boogied slowly and sensually to deep guttural sounds of raunchy music at juke joints every Friday and Saturday night. The sounds of Bessie Smith, Muddy Waters, and Howling Wolf took center stage as they belted out lowdown dirty blues in songs like "Hootchie Cootchie Man" and "Somebody's in My Home." Unlike the church people, the blues people found the religion of Jesus inadequate for coping with the personal problems and social contradictions they experienced that week. As church people soothed their souls with the song, "Lord I want to be a Christian in my heart," the people at the honky tank transcended their agony by facing it with stoic defiance and ironic tenacity. "I got the blues but I am too damn mean to cry."²⁸⁶

Cone, the systematic theologian, provides tremendous explanatory value as to the prominence of both the church and the juke joint as the primary Black outlets of catharsis for its targeted celebrants. Cone articulates this phenomenon in the following, "each group respected each other because they both knew that they helped in their own way individuals cope with the troubles of Black life. But it was not possible to be a member in good standing with both of the groups at the same time because the church demanded that an individual make a choice between the devils music and the sweet melodies of Jesus."²⁸⁷

It is reasonable to infer that Bearden, Arkansas, was fairly representative of the social political dynamics of the South and as such the primacy of both the prophetic Black Church

285. Cone, James H. "Introduction." In *Risks of faith the emergence of a Black theology of liberation, 1968-1998*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1999.

286. Cone, *Risks of Faith*

287. Bois, W. E. B., and Farah Jasmine Griffin. "The Passing of the Firstborn." In *The souls of Black folk*. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2005.

tradition and the Black musical tradition is critical for even a rudimentary understanding of Blacks and Black life in the South. It is with this limitation that we must consider Dubois' analysis strikingly shortsighted. The Black American who attempts to be human (i.e., Black is analogous rhetorically to subhuman) is confronted with not merely the threat of death, but also with nigh madding processes of facing the human absurdity that is compounding by the inescapability of disease, disappointment, and despair.

West asserts that in *Souls*, Dubois faces the problems at the center of being human in his chapter entitled, "On the Passing of the Firstborn Son." Burghardt, It is nigh tragic, not in death of the son, but that Dubois attempts to rationalize in light of his enlightenment views as a means to cope by rational attempts to boost his spirit. Dubois attempts to boost his spirit by rationalizing that his child is free and that he as the representative Black man time is not nigh.

Dubois postulates his son's new found freedom as he asserts the following:

All that day and all that night there sat awful gladness in my heart—nay blame me not if I see the world thus darkly through the veil and my soul whispers ever saying not dead, not dead; not bound but free. No bitter meanness now shall sicken his baby heart till he dies a living death; no taunt shall madden his happy boyhood. Fool that I was to think or wish that this little soul should grow choked and deformed with the veil. I might have known that yonder deep unworldly look that ever anon floated past his eyes were peering far beyond this narrow now. In the poise of his little curl crowned head did there not sit all the wide pride of being which his father had hardly crushed in his own heart. For what froth shall a Negro want with pride amid the studied humiliations of fifty million fellows? Well, speed my boy before the world dubbed your ambition insolence had held your ideals unattainable and taught you to cringe and bow. Better far this nameless void stops my life than a sea of sorrow for you.²⁸⁸

Dubois seems to say to the reader that it is much better for his son to die than live in the disrespect or dishonor that Black life explicitly and implicitly entails. This idea again affirms Socrates' assertion that the aim of life is not merely living, but living honorably. Put crudely,

288. Dubois, W.E.B. "Of the Passing of the First-Born," In *The Souls of Black Folk*. : <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/DubSoul.html>, 1903.

Dubois rationalizes his son's death as the means to freedom from being a problem (i.e., nigger).

In Black life and literature, there exists a tenuous line that one must causally walk by considering death to be freedom from dehumanization and White degradation. One runs the risks of romanticizing acts such as the one taken by Sethe in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Since Dubois has been tainted by the veil and is our representative man, he concludes this chapter when he articulates the burden that he must bear alone. (In that he after all is Dubois):

If one must have gone why not I? Why may I not rest me from the restless was not the world's alembic, time in his young hands and is not my time warning are there so many workers in the viney and that the fair promise of this little body could lightly be tossed away. The wretched of my race that line the alleys of the nation sit fatherless and unmothered; but love sat beside his cradle and in his ear wisdom waited to speak. Perhaps he now knows all love and needs not to be wise. Sleep then, child, sleep till I sleep and waken to a baby voice and the ceaseless patter of little feet above the veil.²⁸⁹

Dubois seem to be uttering internalized self-loathing when he articulates that the majority of Blacks are wretched in that they do not have the mother or father that young Burghardt had. This has elaborated on existentialist overtones, thus, in the terms of existentialist, if you have not killed yourself you have chosen to live.

Negrophobia, White Fears as Reasonable Racism: Addressing Dubois' Assertions about Black Criminality

Black criminality much like race is a social construction. Perceptions of Blacks criminality have been and will continue to mar the attempts of Blacks to make social gains. In light of the following, I would like to analyze the following by Dubois:

Ignorance and poverty are the vastest of the Negro problems. But to these latter years have added a third the problem of Negro crime. That a great problem of social morality must have become eventually the central problem of emancipation is clear as day to any student of history. In its grosser form as a problem of serious crime it is already upon us. Of course it is false and silly to represent that White women in the south are in daily

289. Dubois, "Of the Passing

danger of Black assaulters. On the contrary White womanhood in the south is absolutely safe in the hands of ninety-five percent, ten times safer than Black Womanhood in the hands of White Men. Nevertheless there is a large and dangerous class of Negro criminals, paupers, outcasts. The existence and growth of such a class far from causing surprise should be recognized as the natural result of a social disease called the Negro problem.²⁹⁰

The notion of Black criminality is linked to that which society's construes threat. Richard Delgado, law professor and an instrumental figure in Critical Race Theory's formulation, puts forward the following: "The social construction of Blacks as criminals did not come about by accident; there were Black breakthroughs and successes. In early times, the need for repressions set in shortly afterward as a means of repression as the means to limit Black gains. In Dubois' comments, he is reveling in that it reveals yet another double standard that Blacks must endure. These double standard realities to the social acceptance of crime as a means to garner initial social capital would allow one's group to pursue the more socially acceptable avenues of legitimizing. For ethnic immigrants who occupied an "off White" positionality, criminality is lauded as representative of group sovereignty. Dubois is revealing to the reader the persuasive power of Negrophobia, in that the widespread belief that Blacks are and always have been violently criminal is almost irrefutable. This notion is not merely true in the eyes of Whites; Blacks widely harbor this negrophobia. Reverend Jesse Jackson, for example, recently said, "There is nothing more painful for me at this stage in my life than to walk down the street and hear footsteps and start thinking about robbery, then look around and see somebody White and be relieved."²⁹¹

290. Dubois, W.E.B. "Of the Training of Black Folk," In *The Souls of Black Folk*: <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/DubSoul.html>, 1903.

291. Armour, Jody David. *Negrophobia and reasonable racism the hidden costs of being Black in America*. New York: New York University Press, 1997

The comment by (Jesse) Jackson is most telling and provides tremendous explanatory value. Much can be garnered from a long-standing Black leader such as Jackson to admit to harboring negrophobia. Dubois' rhetoric is powerful in that it is not merely statistical or that it is both.

In Jody David Armour's work entitled, *Negrophobia and Reasonable Racism: The Hidden Costs of Being Black in America*,²⁹² Armour presents the two types of Negrophobia. First there is the reasonable Negrophobia and then there is the rational racist phobia. It is nigh unfathomable to me as to the possible rationale that Dubois would have for articulating a concern about Black criminality. Similar to the reasonable person's standard, the reasonable racist is a statistical racist. In contrast, the Bayesian racist is a racist in that the statistical in that they reason it is not racist to recognize a potential threat to one's wellbeing. Couple Armour's sentiments with the invocation of White fear that arise at the mere suggestion of miscegenation. The terror and potential danger to Blacks that can be caused by White fear is instructive. Consider the following experience by Black writer Nathan McCall:

White fear can cost you your life. Ask Emmett Till's mother or the Scottsboro boys what White fear can do. Ask Black old timers in Rosewood, Florida, or Tulsa, Oklahoma, were a chance encounter between a Black man and a White woman in an elevator like this one led to a town of lunatic Whites to launch a lunatic killing binge. Ask Blacks up north Boston about Charles Stuart, a White man who murdered his pregnant wife and told police a Black man did it, or quiz brothers down south in Union, South Carolina, where a White woman named Susan Smith drowned her two children and claimed that a Black carjacker did it. That's White fear. Blacks have much more reason to be afraid of Whites than they have to be of us. Black fears get dismissed, but White fears get attention.²⁹³

McCall's articulation of the widespread impact that White fear has is enlightening in that it underscores both White males' fear of Black-White sexual relations and the derogatory social

292. David Armour, *Negrophobia*

293. McCall, Nathan. *What's going on: personal essays* New York: Random House, 1997.

action that corresponds to the aforementioned fear (i.e., White fear has access to the legitimate and coercive force of the state). Dubois' assertion that White womanhood is far safer in the hands of Black Men than the inverse, while obviously true in my view, the statements show obliviousness to the Southern sexual matrix. It is illuminating to examine the life of Booker T. Washington in that many have asserted that his accommodations in his political thought and praxis amounted to racial surrender.

To Whites, Washington was the representative man of the Black race. Washington was in some White minds a near mythic figure. Thus the following sentiment espoused by a White Southerner provides tremendous explanatory value as to the mind of the typical White Southerner.

Every southern man of intelligence honors Booker T. Washington but no southern gentlemen would sit at a table with him under any consideration whatever. We are willing to pay him Homage for his good works and we honor him in our hearts but we cannot admit him to social equality because that involved a principal which is vital to the preservation of the southern White race from the evils of intermarriage with Blacks.²⁹⁴

Although there was some clamoring amongst southern Whites that Washington dining with the president was absolute, it verifies that he was not the apolitical Negro that his personal politics were allegedly premised upon. It seems that the primary disdain was found in the sexual realm. It is in this sexual realm that a phenomenon such as lynching and the proctoring of Jim Crow laws were almost immune from attack in that it was couched in the rhetoric of social and sexual preservation.

In many respects, our country's sexual history is an attempt on the part of White Men of every social stratum to protect the virtue of the upper class White women. To this end, John D'Emilio states the following:

294. "Booker T. Washington and Theodore Roosevelt," *History in an Hour*, accessed , <http://www.historyinanhour.com/2010/09/12/booker-t-Washington-and-Theodore-Roosevelt/>.

The protection of White women's virtue and containment of female sexuality within marital reproductive relations. Southern White Men of the planter (i.e., middle class) classes enjoyed extreme sexual privileges. Most southern moralists condoned White Men of this class seeking sexual gratification of their lusts provided they did so discreetly with poor Whites or Black Women .²⁹⁵

In my view, it is clear in the previous statement that historically a clear distinction has been drawn between those racial and class groups, regarding which one can intermarry, and those which serve as the vessels for the authoritative group's sexual gratification of near animalistic lust. Why has there always been a deep-seated fear (in the public sphere at least) on the parts of Whites in general and White males in particular about having sexual contacts with non-Whites? What is the cause of this phenomenon? Some have asserted that in a historical sense that because our country has had a history marred with the exploitation of groups who have the misfortune of being identified as non-White that one should abstain from interracial sexual relations in that it spares ones progeny ill treatment.

This proposition may in fact have merit. That being said, it is my view that there is a societal shared notion that lewdness and debauchery are part and parcel of White of the character traits of non-Whites. Process of differentiation has a long-standing history in our nation.

D'Emilio puts forward the following:

Ever since the 17th century, European migrants to America had merged racial and sexual ideology in order to differentiate themselves from Indians and Blacks to strengthen the mechanisms of social control over slaves and to justify the appropriation of Indian and Mexican lands through the destruction of Native people and their cultures. In the 19th century sexuality continued to serve as a powerful means by which White Americans maintained dominance over people of other races. Both scientific and popular thought supported the view that Whites were civilized and rational while members of other races were savage, irrational, and sensual. These animalistic elements posed a particular threat to middle class Americans, who sought to maintain social stability during rapid economic change and to ensure that a virtuous citizenry would fulfill the dream of republicanism.

295. D'Emilio, John, and Estelle B. Freedman. "Race & Sexuality." In *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*. . Reprint, Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1997.

At a time when middle-class morality rested heavily upon the belief in the purity of women in the home, stereotypes of immoral women of other races contributed to the belief in White superiority.²⁹⁶

In our country, White Men in the past justified the practice of lynching by suggesting that it was done as a means of keeping White women from being defiled by Black Men. In this manner, lynching and Jim Crow laws were almost immune from attack in that it was couched in the rhetoric of sexual stereotypes and “normalcy.” D’Emilio puts forth the following:

When members of this group (i.e., White males) encounter people of other races whose sexual patterns differ from their own, repercussions were both extreme and ambivalent. For one Whites stereotype other groups as negative images of their own ideals. By labeling them as sexual savages, Whites reassured themselves that their own race was indeed the civilized one that it aspired to be. Distancing themselves from the sexuality of other races served instrumentally as well as symbolic purposes, by characterizing other races as at best remote sexual pagans and at worst sexual monsters in pursuit of White women. Whites could manipulate the sexual fears of their own culture in order to justify the conquest of the Indians, Mexicans, and Blacks. In the latter case, Southerners invoked the specter of miscegenation to support their efforts to deny Black people full citizenship and to create a racially segregated society based on the rule of terror.²⁹⁷

It is with this historical understanding that I place Jimmy in the lineage of individuals who have violently responded to the shared intimacy of two individuals from different races The story of Blacks in America is one that is made up of an amalgam of passion, White supremacist rhetoric, unfounded superstition, fraudulent science, dishonest economic practices, and erroneous religious beliefs. Stanley Crouch puts forward the following about Dubois in his text entitled, *Reconsidering the Souls of Black Folks*.²⁹⁸ Crouch sets out to again reexamine the legacy of

296. D’Emilio, “Intimate Matters,” .

297. Ibid.

298. Crouch, Stanley, and Playthell Benjamin. *Reconsidering The souls of black folk: thoughts on the groundbreaking classic work of W.E.B. Dubois*. Philadelphia, Pa.: Running, 2004.

Dubois' most momentous work and tries to glean lessons from it. Concerning Dubois, Crouch puts forward the following:

The Life and Thought of Dubois are at the center of the best to worst aspects of the American story. It is the tale of an intellectual who championed some of the best and the worst ideas proposed to make the world better for Negroes. That bag of troubles formed the kind of mess that Dubois found himself facing throughout his lifetime and the same kind of mess part brilliant, part ridiculous that one finds in his own thinking when it comes to define meaning of race of heritage and of group potential that he tries to order in his souls of Black Folks.²⁹⁹

Crouch's assertion about the audacious task that DuBois set out to accomplish with his first autobiographical work is instructive in that he set out to make *Souls* the penultimate text on race. Couch proceeds to expound on this in the following manner:

What made dubious was the fact that he had a high level of intelligence joined with a bracing charismatic arrogance that caused him to assume before he was twenty five that he would make an impression on the world. Oh yea the young brown skinned man from Barrington, Massachusetts had a messianic sense of his fate, which is to say that his role would be to teach people the profound things that they desperately needed to know if they were ever to save themselves from the narrows of misfortune superstition and manipulative lies .The ordinary messiah often has a religious message that rocks the walls and turns the present order into Humpty Dumpty. In the case of Black Willie from New England, the message was political and cultural primarily because the questions of color was twisted up in the nation's politics and in the assumptions underlying the correct way of living that aided a racist hierarchy and as a man who can be called nothing other than an intellectual, Dubois inherited not so much the zeitgeist of his age but the ideas that purified a body of thought made extraordinary complex due to the particulars of the human situations of which they arrived.³⁰⁰

In my view, the ambitions of Dubois as put forth by Crouch, perhaps irrefutably show that Dubois considered having the mantle of Black leadership thrust on his shoulders as fulfillment of his trajectory (i.e., life project). Dubois made a critical idealist miscalculation by thinking that through reason, debate, and dialogue that he was just as legitimate as they. In a similar vein, Dubois overestimated the importance of the intellectual realm and thus drastically

299. Crouch , *Reconsidering The Souls*

300. Ibid.

underestimated the power of that which is irrational (i.e., spiritual). I would like to use as a case study the persona of Frederick Douglass and of Malcolm X. These individuals, while certainly not the posers of intellects compared to Dubois, were able to inspire through exploitation of that which exists in the spiritual realm. For example, Frederick Douglass' oratory skill and content border on the sermonic and bespeak a majestic quality all their own. Angela Dillard postulates that Douglass was a master orator and that his ability to compel was sheer works of majesty. She put forth the following:

This endeavor to press for inclusion by citing sacred texts of the nation on the one hand and the unfinished business of American democracy on the other has been enormously successful strategy for reform. It has helped to transform the country gristling America's civil religion. This strategy derives the moniker the "American jeremiads." African Americans have been exceptionally adept at crawling inside the jeremiads form and appropriating its twin appeals the judgment of god and to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. In the late 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries, slavery was intrepid as a seminal sin (by some), an offense in the eyes of others, an abuse of natural liberty and perhaps most significantly contrary to the meaning of American democracy. In the hands of Frederick Douglass, the Jeremiad was elevated to a political art form.³⁰¹

In a speech given on July 4, 1852, Mr. Douglass spoke before an audience of anti-slavery supporters in which he admonishes the country for not living up to its most foundational values: "Your fathers have lived and died and done their work and have done much of it well. You must live and die; you must do your own work. You have no right to enjoy a child's share in the labor of your fathers unless you do your own work. You have no right to wear out and waste the hard earned fame of your fathers to cover your indolence."³⁰²

In deconstructing the rhetorical power of Douglass, one finds a prophetic admonishment that I assert, tries to evoke in the listener, the arousal of remembrance, recognition, and

301. Dillard, *Guess*,

302. Dillard, *Guess*.

recompense. Douglass' rhetoric walks a tenuous line. This must be done without causing the listener to feel a sense of indignation. It may be asked how this act successfully is undertaken. Douglass commences his address using the pronouns "your" and "you." It is in this act that Douglass rhetorically attempts to distance himself, who knows all too well the positionality of the bondservant (i.e., slave) and his audience of listeners. Astutely Douglass closes the gap by invoking the right to call himself a "fellow citizen" and to use the collective "we."

I again turn to Dillard to assert the effectiveness of this maneuver: "In the course of his speech Douglass sites the Declaration of Independence, the Bible and the Constitution, (which does not, he argues, support or condone slavery) to expose the hypocrisy of a free yet slaveholding nation. Douglass uses scorching irony, not convincing argument. Dubois, although a direct descendent of Douglass, lacks Douglass' sermonic critical capacity that allowed Douglass to grab hold of men's hearts and not merely their reason. In a similar matter, the rhetorical web that Malcolm X, the fiery polemical he was, is perhaps the personification of the revolutionary Black tradition of orality, who, as previously mentioned, shares no particular affinity for this land or its civil religion as Douglass and Dubois clearly did.

The message to the grassroots provides tremendous explanatory value as to Malcolm's effectiveness in a manner that eludes the rare intellect like Dubois. The message to the grassroots commencements by Malcolm invited his audience in for an informal and simple chat to discuss their present positionality. This prepared text (i.e., speech) by Malcolm combining two of Malcolm's most striking rhetorical methods: his use of the dichotomy between so-called house and field Negro and his analogy of the coffee cup. Malcolm's rhetorical prowess was such that he transformed an inconsequential act such as putting cream into one's coffee into a political statement. Consider the following:

If I have a cup of coffee that is too strong for me because it's too Black, I weaken it by pouring cream into it. I integrate it with cream. If I keep pouring enough cream into it, pretty soon the entire flavor of the coffee is changed; the very nature of the coffee has changed. If enough cream is poured in, eventually you wouldn't know that I even had coffee in this cup. This is what happened with the march on Washington. The Whites did not integrate, they infiltrated it. Whites joined it. They engulfed it they became so much part of it; it lost its original flavor. It ceased to be a Black march; it ceased to be militant; it ceased to be angry; it ceased to be angry. It ceased to be a march.³⁰³

Despite the majestic grandeur of Dubois' intellect, his writing never created the bond of allegiance that leaders such as Douglass or Malcolm could through their speech. Some would argue that the high rates of illiteracy amongst African Americans would of course give an obvious advantage to practitioners of Black prophetic oral tradition. In conclusion, I would like to restate that Dubois was in fact an "Intellectual Aristocrat" and as such overestimated the influence that his intellectual activity could garner from both Whites and the uneducated Black masses. Secondly, this would view as an intellectual aristocrat left him unable to relate to the Black masses, which would have rendered much of his potential power ineffective as the leader of the race. And finally, the two aforementioned propositions left Dubois ill-equipped to deal with a race of people whose ear could be gotten by chiefly the spiritual (i.e., other worldly) and oratorical because his prowess was in the realm of the written and world.

303. Malcolm X, "Message to Grassroots," *Teaching American History*, accessed <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1145>.

Chapter 4

What it's like to be a Bat (oops, I mean) a Black (and Woman) Philosopher: Questions of

Narrative Particularity: The Meaning Racial of Subjectivity

With few exceptions we are all today “White folks’ niggers.” Now, do not wince. I do not mean to insult or be derogatory, but this is a concrete designation which indicates that very many colored folk: Japanese, Chinese, Indians, Negroes, and of course the vast majority of White folks: Have been so enthused, oppressed by current White civilization that they and think and judge everything by its terms. They have no norms that are not set in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They can conceive of no future world that is not dominated by present White nations and thoroughly shot through with their ideals, their method or government, their economic organization, their literature, and their art; or in other words, their throttling of democracy, their exploitation of labor, their industrial imperialism and their color hate. To broach before such persons any suggestion of radical change, any idea of intrusion physical or spiritual on the part of alien races is to bring down upon ones devoted head the most tremendous astonishment and contempt.³⁰⁴

Philosopher Thomas Nagel³⁰⁵ is known to provide one of the strongest critiques of philosophical reductionism. In fact, he begins his seminal work “What It’s Like to Be a Bat”³⁰⁶ with the seemingly straightforward proposition that “consciousness is what really makes the mind-body problem intractable.”³⁰⁷ In an attempt to buttress this, Nagel posits that many philosophers attempt to solve this conundrum by a formal reductionism that rarely sheds any light on our problems. Nagel asserts here that though philosophers might be a special type of human or rather might be understood as humans with what we might call a special capacity for

304. Reiland, *Du Bois’s Dialectics*,

305. Jones, Janni, and George Yancy. “The impairment of empathy of Goodwill Whites to African Americans.” In *What White looks like: African-American philosophers on the whiteness question*, New York: Routledge, 2004.). This text is how I came to know the work of Thomas Nagel where and Jones differ is in that she makes distinctions between goodwill and non-goodwill Whites in ways that I don’t think are that as philosophically interesting to me, and she might unwittingly let some folks think that the ability to understand a phenomena is simply reducible to one’s will to do so. The reader should not misread this as an attempt to disregard the contributions of White brothers and sisters who are committed to racial justice my point here is simply that having so-called “Goodwill” is not enough one must be committed to being a good action White.

306. Nagel, “Bat,” 435-450.

307. Ibid.

understanding that even we (philosophers) are likely to fall prey to the general human weakness for explanations of what is incomprehensible in terms suited for what is familiar and well understood though entirely different.³⁰⁸

It is from this aforementioned presupposition that Nagel informs us that the most important characteristic feature of human consciousness, in his view, is our mental being, which he would say should be distinguished from our mental function.

Nagel is primarily concerned about the qualitative experience of actually being a bat. Nagel asserts that the less alike an individual is to another, the more unlikely we are to attempt the process of mapping our experiences onto that other. This phenomenon is so because of the subjective character of our experiences. It could be argued that Nagel's primary concern with this text was to provide explanatory value to the mind-body conundrum. And this work has been a hotly contested issue in the Philosophy of mind for nigh 40 years or so. Nagel does an admirable job of describing it. He may have a provided a philosophically defensible platform of inquiry for those of us who are interested in questions of epistemology and racial differentiation.

Consider the hypothetical: What would the explanatory value of Nagel's proposition be for this audience if we substitute "bat" with the racial category "Black?" Consider the following: Is there anything in method or experience that would allow a White American to extrapolate the inner life of a Black American from the perspective of a White person. If the experience of a White person provides the basic material for their imagination whose range is necessarily limited, it will not help for a White person to think of themselves as Black in a similar manner that my playing blind would be analogous to actually being blind is not the same subjective experience of one who is actually blind. My primary contention is not that Blacks and Whites are

308. Nagel, "Bat."

different species; rather my contention is simply that Blacks and Whites generally occupy such a different social reality that in terms of garnering a subjective understanding of one another, it is almost impossible.

Thus it is necessary for the articulation of African American Philosophers to narrate from their subjective position, which like all stations of thought, is political and particularly suited. It is with keeping this question, “What is like being a Black Philosopher,” in mind that this chapter is written. Again we make use of the autobiographically informed fictional narrative to facilitate our discussion:

It was a day much like any other. I had too much to do and not enough time to do it. But rather than sweat the impending tasks I had at hand, I decided to go to one of my favorite social establishments, the cigar shop, to take a break and collect my thoughts for a few moments. Then I would begin the rest of my evening, which was going to be spent reading texts that would help me prepare for an upcoming conference. Though I had to do this reading tonight, my friends constantly tell me I need to start being better to myself. As a result, I decided to treat myself to an end-of-the-week/weekend kickoff cigar. As I enter this quaint little retail shop, which, for many of its male customers serves as a secular cathedral, I realize it had been this to me for years as well; that is until my recent religious reawakening experience.

Now, I don’t hang out as often as I have in past years. That being said, I still do rather enjoy the smell and taste of a premium hand rolled cigar. A cigar, despite its obvious health risks, has always been of great utility to me, as a cigar affords one some time away from it all.

It is both a financial and time commitment. In terms of a financial commitment, a good cigar can run the price gamut from a four dollar Las Callbris Honduran to a thirty dollar Romeo and Juliettea Museum 75th Anniversary Edition. Though I have been given several super

premium cigars from Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, and Cuba, I generally smoke cigars well in the four-to-seven dollar range. (And to be very candid with you, I probably do this too much.)

Depending on a cigar's length and ring gage, the time commitment that one might dedicate to properly finishing a cigar has a wide range of variation as well. My favorite cigar size is a Double Corona; as its name indicates, it is twice the length of a traditional Corona. The stick (cigar) I have selected today is one of my favorites: the Arturo Fuentes Opus X Cedar-wrapped Forbidden X Double Corona. This beautiful creation measures a whopping eight inches by 56-ring gage (Freudian implications aside for the time being).

I truly love smoking a big power cigar. This occasion is very special because this size stick I have in my hand is much sought after. So much so, retailers lucky enough to get them in stock routinely limit customers to purchasing a maximum of two cigars per day to prevent hoarding of these rare stogies. To be candid, the availability of these cigars is secondary to me as the biggest barrier to having them. The first is their hefty twenty dollar price tag. If it had not been by some strange twist of fate, where my clumsiness allowed me to trip in such a way as to hit the ground at the perfect angle to see a twenty dollar bill lodged in between the couch cushions, I would never have been in the position I am now about to light up a cigar this good and take an hour away from it all.

As I light my cigar and twist it to ensure an even burn, I cannot help but notice amongst the regular cast of characters that there is a new gentleman here amongst the so-called fraternity of the leaf. He seems to speak with a bit of an accent, which despite his age still appears to be quite heavy; perhaps he is from Europe or maybe he is Armenian or Greek. At one time in our country's history, this man would not have been thought of as entirely White as I imagine him to

construct his personal identity now.³⁰⁹ He sits down next to me and we exchange pleasantries, we begin to discuss the weather, politics, soccer, tennis, and religion. He seems to be a rather nice guy, but I can tell something about me has him puzzled, and I am a bit unsettled being one who prides himself on being able to read folks pretty well. I inquired about it. He begins to talk about his dissatisfaction with the current state of our state's public flagship university's football team. I agree that we should be considerably better than our results on the field indicate. He then indicated that it probably does not help to have one of your linemen in a cigar shop smoking incredibly large and pricey cigars.

It took a few seconds for his comments to register with me as to what was meant by his statement. As I looked around, I did not see anyone who could have been mistaken for a college lineman. After all, everyone in this establishment at this time was considerably older than my thirty-something years of age. Having just recently shaved my beard, which makes me look younger, I thought that was perhaps it. Perhaps it was my dress: I was looking rather urban sheik. I told the gentleman that I was not a football player, but thanked him for the compliment. As I started to worry about my appearance, I tried to laugh at the comment, but the gentleman persisted in asking me questions about my affiliation with the university, as he saw my jersey and coat. I told him that I was a student here at the university and that I was working on my doctorate. He then smiled at me and said that it was good to see that I was getting my education

309. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*. In this text, Professor Roediger argues that White ethnic minorities faced harsh discrimination and intense societal suspicion from more established White populations. With this in mind, he rejects any notion that so-called ethnics were offered full-fledged White status immediately on arrival to the shores of United States from Italy, Hungary, Ireland, Poland and Germany. Professor Roediger documents assertions to both historical record and deconstructive theoretical analysis. To his credit, Professor Roediger passionately points out ways that in ethnic White space to oral treatment, an effort for social inclusion, their treatment pales in comparison to that suffered by African Americans. This is life and there are numerous examples of how part and parcel of the ethnic White socialization process was to join and all-American pastime of being discriminatory with a large majority against African-Americans. And Roediger's assertion is far more accurate historical than say Ian F. Haney Lopez's *The Social Construction of Race: Some Observations on Illusion, Fabrication, and Choice*, which uses a form of ethnicity theory which is, in my estimation, a bit ahistorical in that it conflates the experiences of particular groups for the sake of Generalizability.

after my playing career was done. He then asked me if I was trying to get into coaching. I was about to be frustrated with the situation.

I stated to him that I am not trying to pursue coaching and that I am in no way affiliated with any of our school's athletic programs. He then told me that he knows that I played something simply because of my sheer size. He said, "You look like a football player." He then indicated that he himself played football for the university and that he thought I should have played, or else it would be a colossal waste of my size. I again told the gentleman, "I have only been on this campus to study and that my area of study was Philosophy." He then replied, "Really? You don't look like a philosopher!" He asked me what I was going to do with that. I was taken aback; after all what does a philosopher look like? Maybe Robert Birt was right when he asserted that

Philosophy is often regarded as among the highest intellectual activities and manifestations of human intellectual excellence, a superior endeavor suited for superior (i.e., White) minds; hardly an endeavor for which Blacks are deemed capable or which would fit them for their natural function as useful laborers. To this day "Black philosopher" is largely a contradiction in terms or an anomaly or undeserved intruder into a realm that does not concern him or her. That any but Whites can be masters in the intellectual realm, that Blacks might have something to say of value to contribute to American or world philosophical culture is an idea at best tolerated with a grain of salt or simply rejected and or ridiculed as ludicrous.³¹⁰

I see that Agape is comfy in the shop today smoking a flavored cigar. We begin to have a conversation that goes from the ridiculous to the thought provoking. We somehow fire up a discussion on the obstacles to Blacks pursuing Philosophy as a viable profession.

Agape Marie: Is it appropriate for us to put a color designation as a modifier for philosophical inquiry? As an architect, I would argue that there is no Black architecture, right? A building is just a building. Isn't Philosophy just Philosophy?

310. Birt, Robert, and Leonard Harris. "Negation of Hegemony: The Agenda of Philosophy Born of Struggle." In *Philosophy born of struggle: anthology of Afro-American philosophy from 1917*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Pub. Co., 1983.

Goines: Well, let us chop it up. I do not know if a building is just a building. After all, I was reading Darrel Wayne Fields' majestic text entitled *Architecture in Black*,³¹¹ which is the first theoretical treatment of architecture focused on Blackness as the primary trope in the discipline of architecture. (This field of inquiry is sometimes known as the "unfettered art form."³¹²) Fields contends that from its inception, architecture as a field has an inextricable link to race, particularly in the work of G.W.F. Hegel. Architecture is the discipline concerned with the construction of space while simultaneously being a constructed space.

As Fields argues, the discipline is a repository for anti-Blackness and White supremacy. One of my primary contentions of my project is that, much like architecture and other professions, the academic discipline of Philosophy is also a repository of both White supremacy and anti-Black (particularly as it relates to Black Americans) sentiment.

To put it rather crudely, Philosophy is a White space. To be more specific, Philosophy in and of America (the United States) is a White space³¹³ where race is under-theorized to the detriment of this discipline. I have this idea that I want to tell you about. I saw a film the other day, not high cinema by any means, but it illustrates some ideas that I do believe are concretely applicable to my own project. I wanted to share them with you and bounce some ideas around, as

311. Fields, Darrell Wayne. *Architecture in black*. London: Athlone Press, 2000. Architecture is also important for this study as much of my study will extricate from this discipline, additionally my charter is based on a former love interest of mine, one Tasha Marie Love, who brought the work of fields and Linda Groat to me.

312. Groat, "Architecture's Resistance," 3-10.

313. Yancy, George. *Reframing the practice of philosophy bodies of color, bodies of knowledge*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012. The space of philosophy is a theoretical empire. This empire is one based on whiteness. As Yancy states, "Upon examination, whiteness, contrary to its historical performance as a natural occurrence, emerges as a value code deployed by a certain raciated (White) group of people that limits and structures what is deemed intelligible, valuable, normal, abnormal, superior, inferior, beautiful, ugly, and so on. As a presumed sovereign voice, treating itself as hyper normative and unmarked Whiteness conceals its status as a raciated, located, and positioned because of presumed historical stability and ontological givenness." Whiteness creates, not merely uncovers. Also see Michael Peters, "White Philosophy in/of America". *Pragmatist Today* (Summer 2011), accessed August 1, 2013, <http://www.pragmatismtoday.eu/summer2011/Peters.pdf>.

you know that dialogue is so very key to the life of the mind.³¹⁴ I would like to say that the dominant discourse in Philosophy presents itself as colorblind. Flowing from this logic as a steadfast tendency to question the legitimacy of adjective qualifiers of Philosophy from its noble norms that transcend the individual and his or her community, as it is thought that since no Black logic exists, then how can there be a Black Philosophy?

Robert Birt and others argue that Black Philosophy's agenda of contributing to the transformation of social reality differentiates it from dominant conceptions of Philosophy and its fetishizing the clarification of concepts.³¹⁵ To this end Birt asserts,

The Afro-American agenda has called into question this claim insofar as one looks simplistically at it in isolation, but if viewed in a larger dynamic of Philosophy being a collection of discourses, the dominant agenda is inclined to be supportive of racism in society. There has been an institutional inclination to exclude Blacks because an agenda consistent with Black culture (or Black experience) is relatively different from the dominant philosophical agenda which only recognizes relevant similarities as important.³¹⁶

Agape Marie: There is really no such thing as Black Philosophy right? Why would anyone want to study a Philosophy like that?

Goines: Let me put it to you this way...but I must say before I make these comments that it is not my attempt to essentialist the Black philosophic experience. I am merely looking to those unified concepts about Black Philosophy. According to philosopher Thomas Nagel, who wrote the very influential article, "What It's Like to Be a Bat?"³¹⁷ Nagel asserts that the less alike

314. Here Goines is asserting a foundational tenet of CRT and other thinkers such as Martin Heidegger, for example, wrote, "our being...is founded in language" and language "only becomes actual in conversation," an activity he defined as "speaking with others about something for the purpose of bringing about "the process of coming together." From this definition, Heidegger could argue, "conversation and its unity support our existence" and, indeed, "we ... are a conversation." And although this is the process Martin Buber described as dialogue, he used the term conversation to suggest his notion of the ideal dialogue. For Buber, "genuine conversation" is a dialogue in which each participant "has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relationship between him and them." Found in Cornel West, *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1997).

315. Birt, "Negation."

316. Ibid.

317. Nagel, "Bat."

an individual is to another, the more unlikely we are to attempt the process of mapping our experiences onto the other.³¹⁸ This phenomenon is because of the subjective character of our experiences. Famously, Nagel uses his experience with the only mammal capable of sustained flight (bat) to provide us some explanatory value. We know that bats go through this world by means of echolocation and sonar; to us humans this phenomenon is best approximated by our vision.³¹⁹

Though Nagel's primary concern with this text was to provide explanatory value to the mind-body conundrum, which he does an admirable job of describing, it is my view that he may have provided a philosophically defensible platform of inquiry for those of us who are interested in questions of epistemology and racial differentiation. Consider the hypothetical: What would the explanatory value of Nagel's proposition be for his audience if we substitute bat with the racial category Black. Is there anything in method or experience that would allow a White person to extrapolate the inner life of a Black Person from the perspective of a White person? If the experience of a White person provides the basic material for their imagination, whose range is necessarily limited, it will not help for a White person to think of themselves as Black in a similar manner that my playing blind would be analogous.

Blind is not the same subjective experience of one who is actually blind. My primary contention is not the Blacks and Whites are different species rather my contention is simply that Blacks and Whites generally occupy such a different social reality that in terms of garnering a subjective understanding of one another it is nigh impossible. Thus it is necessary for the articulation of an African American Philosophy and African American Philosophers.

318. Ibid.

319. Birt, "Negation."

To this end it could be argued then that:

Afro-American Philosophy is the interpretation of African-American history highlighting the cultural heritage and political struggles which provide desirable norms that should regulate responses to particular challenges presently confronting Africa-Americans. Afro-America Philosophy is the application of the philosophic techniques of interpretation and justification to the African-America experience. The particular historical phenomenon interpreted and justified by Black Philosophy consisting of religious doctrines, political ideologies, and artistic expression unconscious modes of behavior. Such phenomenon serves as the raw ingredients to be utilized by African-American Philosophy in order to interpret the past. The two basic challenges confronting Afro-American are those of self-image and self-determination.³²⁰

The critic who challenges the legitimacy of Black Philosophy, it seems to William R. Jones and others, must call into question for the abolition of all ethnic modifiers in Philosophy. If the Black experience had not been systematically excluded the need for a Black Philosophy would be merely academic.³²¹

Agape Marie: How might the idea of Black Philosophy and Black philosophers be seen as a contradiction in terms?

Goines: I was just thinking about this earlier—

Philosophy is often regarded as among the highest intellectual activities and manifestations of human intellectual excellence, a superior endeavor suited for superior (i.e., White) minds. Hardly an endeavor for which Blacks are deemed incapable or which would unfit them for their natural function as useful laborers. To this day “Black philosopher” is largely a contradiction in terms or an anomaly or undesired intruder into a realm that does not concern him or her. That any but Whites can be masters in the intellectual realm, that Blacks might have something to say of value, to contribute to

320. West, Cornel, Tommy Lee Lott, and John Pittman. "Philosophy and the Afro-American Experience." In *A companion to African-American philosophy*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003.

321. Jones, William R. "William R. Jones, "The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations," *The Philosophical Forum* 9. William Jones raises the question: could it be that the notion of an African-American philosopher, like a rectangular circle, was a contradiction in terms, or perhaps an ontological aberration? To this end John Pittman writes, "'Philosophy' is usually introduced to college audiences by displaying the writings of some select group of 'dead White men,' all European or Anglo-American. This is traditional, and it is here that the weight of tradition is heaviest." Also see Stuart Hall, Stuart, "Race the Floating Signifier," (2009): 17. Media Education Foundation. [Online.] Transcript. In this text the well renowned cultural theorist and sociologist attempts to forward a discursive view of understanding race and not as he articulates the effects of race per se, Hall contends that the human mind cannot attach meaning unless it has the ability to categorize for the maintenance of order. To this end, Hall contends that race is not in fact as biological significant as it is more akin to a language. This is so because race, most telling to hHall, are the extent to which we use specific systems of thought to make sense of race data.(what we attribute to that difference.) This is so because of the very obviousness of race that clouds our understanding of it. Perhaps the White gentleman who questions the legitimacy of Goines is thinking that a large black man in this field of inquiry is in fact matter out of place.

American or world philosophical culture is an idea at best tolerated with a grain of salt or simply rejected and or ridiculed as ludicrous.³²²

Agape Marie: What are the primary criticisms to Black Philosophy? Other than the fact that you folks are probably generally perceived to be bourgeois. And we know that bourgeois Black Folks are perceived by many to be even more anathema than their similarly positioned White counterparts. They often are victims of the hate stare.³²³ I see that look of disbelief on your face Explain to me again, why you cannot believe why someone would think that you were from a very privileged family because of what you study. I do not understand why you cannot see it. After all, I thought you were from a bourgeois (upper middle class) background when you and I first made each other's acquaintance. I thought your presentation of self³²⁴ was a bit contrived. You play with images very well. Here is this huge Black man who is from a small town housing project, who routinely uses phrases like "commodity fetishism,"³²⁵ "planned obsolescence," "reification," and "qualitatively different social order."³²⁶

322. Brit, "Negation," 115-127.

323. The *Hate Stare* is demonstrative of the often experienced White abhorrence of successful individuals of color. Routinely Blacks or Latinos of higher social prominence experience comparable and in some instances worse treatment than their racial counterparts in the so called underclass. Cerno's comment about class and colors are indicative of White jealousy. For a visual example of hate stare refer to John Singleton's motion picture *Rosewood*. An example follows: White male #1: *That Nigga up the street has a grand piano can you believe that a Nigger with a piano. It just ain't right!* White male #2: *What are you talking about; you don't even play the piano?* White male #1: *I know that that is really ain't the point, but a nigger has one and I don't and I am White. I think that if a nigger has a piano I should have one.* For an in depth analysis of unconscious racism and White denial, see Thomas Ross, *Just Stories: How Law Embodies Racism and Bias* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) and also Charles Lawrence, *The Id, Ego and Equal Protection: Reckoning with Unconscious Racism* (

324. Goffman, Erving. *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959.

325. According to an online reference black academy Frankfurt School and Commodity fetishism, the. <http://www.blacksacademy.net/content/3001.html>. The Frankfurt School also accepts Marx's theory of commodity fetishism. This theory argues that people in a capitalist society do not desire a product for its intrinsic qualities but desire the product as a symbol of some social value that is attached to it. Marxists distinguish between two kinds of value that can be attached to commodities. These are use value and exchange value. The use value of a commodity is its real value to satisfy a real need. Its exchange value is the value determined by the market through the interaction of supply and demand. In capitalist societies, exchange value dominates use value. Capitalist enterprises create demand for useless products through marketing. According to the Frankfurt School, a revolution leading to the overthrow of the Bourgeoisie is now unlikely. This is because modern capitalism has acquired much greater stability through the creation of higher levels of economic well-being in which the working classes have shared. Society is also controlled by the mass media and pop culture. Capitalism creates "false needs" through marketing. The gratification of these false needs unconsciously makes the people believe that they are happy and consequently reconciles them to the basic injustice of society of which they are only dimly conscious. The injustice of society is more deliberately focused upon marginal groups such as ethnic minorities, the old, and third world countries. Being marginal, these groups lack the power to change the system or bring about a revolution. The function of the culture industries is to exert ideological control over the working classes who are pacified into accepting capitalism. Central to this critique of modern culture is the concept of false needs. This is particularly important to the work of Marcuse. Marcuse believes that peoples real needs are

Goines: I am a bit flabbergasted by these comments, as I don't fancy myself, as particularly bourgeois, but then again I do not imagine most bourgeois people do. But your point is well taken; perhaps it is something particularly different about those of us who study Philosophy, particularly those of us who take up this cross, so to speak, and carry it on racialized Black bodies. Maybe there is something to Cornel West's assertions that part of the explanation for the paucity of African-American profession philosophers is "partly to do with the dominant conceptions publically of the philosopher as the analytic philosopher who is clever, who is sharp, who is good at drawing distinctions, but who does not really relate it to history, struggle, engagement with suffering, how we cope with suffering, how we overcome social misery, etc."³²⁷ So, I understand that criticism on a very real level.

Though I would like to think I am above this, as I do not have the traditional philosopher's background, even for a Black philosopher. For example, one of my favorite texts in the entire corpus of what can properly be said to of Black Philosophy is George Yancy's little volume entitled *17 Conversations with African American Philosophers*.³²⁸

to be created independent and in control of their own lives, thinking for themselves. Capitalism creates false needs which are fulfilled through consumerism, whilst true needs remain unsatisfied. Freedom in Capitalist societies is an illusion. The Bourgeoisie create this illusion by giving the people the false freedom of choice between different brands of the same good.

326. Marcuse, Herbert, and David Graham Cooper. "'Liberation from the Affluent Society" (1967 lecture in London)." In *The dialectics of liberation*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968. The strength of this article can be found in Herbert Marcuse's ability to thoroughly diagnose the dire contemporary social situation. He takes very seriously his task as an educator. He takes great care in his delineation of the meaning of qualitative change by pointing out the distinction between quantitative and qualitative change. He poses that this distinction is not synonymous as some would have us believe with the distinction of reform and revolution. "This is only the case where there is a conjunction of both the qualitative and quantitative; this is why a true revolution has not yet become manifest insofar as there has not yet been a movement to combine both. Today the two potential factors of revolution are disjointed. This is most prevalent in the underdeveloped countries where quantitative change exists, that is to say the creation of human living conditions is in itself the creation of qualitative change but even that is not yet freedom. The second potential factors of revolution, the perquisites of liberation, are all there in advanced industrial countries but are conditioned and perverted by the capitalist organization of society." The preceding passage in the author's view highlights the extent to which Professor Marcuse's critical engagement is one that is explicitly humanitarian in orientation. I assert this is so because he states that it is not merely enough for us to provide humans with living conditions that would allow them to subsist, but those of us who label ourselves critical must never forget that theorization and action are premised on the garnering of freedom not merely personally but for the entirety of the human family. This means, in the author's view, that no matter how well we treat those who are the have-nots, this is a battle for the destruction of suffering, not merely the ability for those that suffer, to suffer in silence in a more humane manner. The author finds this work to be very consistent with other texts in his post *One-Dimensional Man* Corpus.

327. West, Cornel, and George Yancy. "Cornel West." In *African-American philosophers: 17 conversations*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

328. Yancy, George. "Introduction." In *African-American philosophers: 17 conversations*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Agape Marie: Yes, I know you love that book as its one of the very few you will not lend out, which strikes me as antithetical to your generous nature.

Goines: Well, you know it is like my secular Bible. That and James Cone's *Risks of Faith*.³²⁹ This book, though published in 1998, still has such a large sphere of influence as that tiny number, seventeen, represents even now a considerable percentage of the senior Black Americans making a living as professional philosophers. Consider Professor Howard McGarry, professor of Philosophy at Rutgers, who stated at the time of that book's printing, he had been at Rutgers for nearly twenty years and he has had only four African-Americans enter the Philosophy program, and none, save for Paul Taylor, has completed the PhD.³³⁰ But let me return to my point about my route to the study of Philosophy. Of the seventeen philosophers mentioned, only three did not get bachelor's degrees from private institutions or prestigious HBCUs.

None, save for one, Adrian Piper, received an associate's degree, which she did from an art school. All save for Lewis Gordon come from comfortable middle class backgrounds. To this end, Gordon believes that more African Americans would pursue Philosophy professionally. If "to make a long story short, most Black philosophers my age are between 25 and 34 and most are not from a background like mine. For the most part they are from a prestigious secondary school background. For the most part, they are from a middle class background. And for the most part they are individuals who had far, far better training in college and in high school than I did."³³¹

329. Cone, *Risks of Faith*.

330. McGarry, Howard, and George Yancy. "Howard McGarry." In *African-American philosophers: 17 conversations*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

331. Gordon, Lewis, and George Yancy. "Lewis Gordon." In *African-American philosophers: 17 conversations*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Additionally, I think my own personal narrative attests to the legitimacy of his statement. Like Gordon, I am a progeny of public schools (though I, unlike Gordon, have a GED and was forced out). I think he is fundamentally onto something. He suggests that more effort should be made to introduce Philosophy into public schools at earlier levels of education because there tends to be far greater concentration of Black students at these levels of education. In addition, if Philosophy wants to gain more Blacks, there needs to be far more institutional economic resources for students to be able to pursue, such as summer education programs and intellectual summer camps. Additionally, Gordon feels that there needs to be more significant forms of scholarships and fellowships to get folks through graduate school. Those are structural things that need to be in place. And as you know, I am a tremendous advocate of the exposure piece as if it were not for SROP.³³² One cannot be what they have never seen, as the saying goes.

Agape Marie: I assume you have more thoughts than just mere structural analysis.

Which, hearing you talk, I may be able to help you forward your analysis through my own disciplinary expertise. I think we could make some interesting parallels between my field of study, Architecture, and law. But first I would want you to continue to forward your argument about how perceptions of culture play as a “barrier to entry.”³³³ (Said with a wink)

Goines: I know that look; go on and break that down for me.

Agape Marie: I will finish your point and I got you!

332. “Summer Research Opportunity Program,” CIC, <http://www.cic.net/students/srop/home>.

333. Roithmayr, Daria. “Barriers to Entry: A Market Lock-in Model of Discrimination,” *Virginia Law Review* 86: 727-799. Daria Roithmayr states the following “like firms in the market competition, candidates compete for an opportunity on the basis of ability or merit, which varies widely among individuals. In an efficient market the employer or college the superior candidate based on the candidate’s performance on interview, test scores and grades. For markets with limited numbers of opportunities meritocratic competition promotes efficiency it selects applicants who will maximize the value of a job slot or an educational opportunity, achieving the best outcome with limited resources. Conversely race-conscious distribution is understood to be anticompetitive and inefficient because race is not thought to be related to productivity according to the conventional story the color blind market will produce the most efficient outcomes, because it distributes opportunities and resources solely on the basis of ability.”

Goines: Ok then. Gordon and others point out the very culture of Philosophy might be resistant to further inclusion of Blacks. Gordon states rather unequivocally and somewhat provocatively, that the field of Philosophy is so resistant to change largely because most Philosophy departments with PhD programs consist of many mediocre White people, who, in order to protect themselves from their mediocrity, hide behind a welcomed veil of ignorance, usually under a pompous appeal to value neutral objectivity, but also behind a veil of false excellence. They pretend they are better than they really are. They have an interest in so called mainstream Philosophy, continuing to be a boring, ahistorical, non-political enterprise. Now, more concretely, what that means is that there is not only priority placed on certain institutions for publication, but also priorities places on both particular questions and the ways in which those questions get answered.³³⁴

These attitudes and practices are not only alienating for many Blacks who are philosophically oriented, but even if they try to get through many obstacles, they will have to endure the Gate Keepers of the profession.

Now consider the place where you find most Black people who do Philosophy, but who are not listed as philosophers, will be in departments of Religion. Another place will be in: education, Black Studies, American studies, and Political theory (rather reluctantly) are next. Philosophy departments are near the bottom of this list. Now in this discipline, the prejudice is such in this discipline, we treat professional people as philosophers those who possess a PhD in Philosophy although the experience of many Black Folks is to have been treated otherwise. Among White folks, an exception is the JD (Juris Doctorate). Ronald Dworkin and Bruce Ackerman are respected philosophers without PhDs in Philosophy but with JDs. There are however Black people who have PhDs in the Philosophy of Education who do Philosophy but are not recognized as philosophers, at least in their treatment by the APA.³³⁵

334. Attributed to Lewis Gordon in Yancy, *17 Conversations*.

335. Lewis Gordon in Yancy, *17 Conversations*.

If we contrast their treatment with the likes of Derrick Bell³³⁶ or Richard Delgado,³³⁷ I would contend that neither Ackerman nor Dworkin are on par with these two men of color. In fact it still displeases me to no end that many in academia tried to completely dismiss the probative value of Bell's concept of interest convergence until the publishing of *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy (Politics and Society in Twentieth Century America)* by distinguished legal historian Mary L. Dudziak, who happens to be White.

Agape Marie: That's very interesting that you would say that, Goines. There seems to be no end of the institutional and structural issues that might act as a barrier for African Americans pursuing the field of Philosophy. Allow me to put forward some of my own perceptions about why this could be so.

Goines: I would love to hear what you have to say, after all it seems like I have been doing a lot of talking.

Agape Marie: I will try to be brief. However, just in hearing you talk, I think there are some things I think we can broach about why there are few African-Americans who pursue the field of Philosophy. A particular interest to me is the plight of women.

Goines: Ok, sister, I am waiting to hear what you think.

Agape Marie: I think they revolve around three obstacles: pecuniary instability and practical utility. And then the third is that which is connected to the very nature of the profession. Now we all know, in popular conceptions, the reason we all go to school is what?

336. I fall directly on this continuum as my undergraduate degree was in political philosophy and theory and my graduate degree will be in educational policy studies. Derrick Bell is the acknowledged father of Critical Race Theory ("Critical Race Theory," *Wikipedia*, accessed October 6, 2009, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_race_theory). In terms of its formalistic, see Derrick Bell, "Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma," *Harvard Law Review* 93, no. 3 (1980): 518. The concept of interest convergence which states that as it pertains to the forwarded of progressive social policy the United States will only forward the interest of African Americans when it is in the dominant group's interest to do so. Also see Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic eds., *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), the introductory work in the burgeoning field of whiteness studies.

337. Delgado, Richard. *The Rodrigo chronicles: conversations about America and race*. New York: New York University Press, 1995. This work is an in depth non-technical example of Narrative Jurisprudence and Critical Race Theory.

Goines: Well, obviously there is a myriad of reasons why we go to school. I think education is beneficial for understanding of the world and one's development as a human being.

Agape Marie: The primary rational for most people in our modern age for pursuing higher degrees of education is the pecuniary pay off. What I mean by that is simply that people go to school because it allows you to get the oft talked about "good job." We are always told that over the course of your life, your college degree pays substantially more than merely having that high school diploma. In fact, for me, being an architect, I see it in this manner. In fact, I imagine that you have faced some rather quizzical looks from pursuing your intended career path.

Goines: I think you are right, sister. I mean if I hear you talking like I think you are talking, let me give you an example of what I think you are talking about.

As a young man, I had just finished giving one of the best speeches I had ever mustered in my speaking career. I could not have been more than 15 or 16 at the time. The crowd seemed to respond well. They gave as well as they got (to use a boxing term) from the encounter, and I was still buzzing from the experience, high from the euphoric rush. I began to thank the conference organizer, who was sitting to my immediate left. This Steve Harvey look-alike sported a sharp pair of high sheen, green shoes, which would make the Bishop Don Magic Juan jealous. He was one of those brothers who was all about young brothers pursuing higher education. This was so because he imagined it as the primary means of social elevation. He asked me, "Goines, what do you want to major in when you get to college?"

To be quite honest with you, at that time, I had not really thought about it. But he, being a civil rights activist and persistent, forced me to answer the question. I indicated to him that at that point in my young life, the only thing I could see myself majoring in was Philosophy. I wanted to be a philosopher I told him, even though I did not quite know what that was at the

time. Funny thing was, he looked at me with an inquisitive look, grabbed me by the hand, and said, “You are a bright young brother; you could be anything you want. You could be a lawyer, a doctor, and an architect. All those books I know you like to read, but you certainly cannot be a philosopher.”

When I inquired to the gentleman as to why I could not be a philosopher, he said point blank, “You will starve. Isn’t any money in it? And anyway, what does a philosopher do?” Let me add an additional point to your argument, Agape; I think you are right to say that there is a certain perception of pecuniary instability especially coming from neighborhoods where we come from, where cash rules everything. What I mean by this is that in some ways, the mere fact that so few people in the richest country in human history ever get a PhDs is significant.

By and large, I think that most people think folks who pursue this highest of terminal degrees do so for the financial security it could potentially afford. And I know that is not your entire point, Agape, but I certainly see the importance in that. But in addition to perception of financial uncertainty, I think Philosophy also has a certain sense of professional ambiguity. Now what do I mean by this? I cannot count the number of times in my life, when someone has asked me about my course of study. Inevitably the next question is, “How are you going to use that degree?”

Agape Marie: Hmm, this sounds very interesting, continue. As you were speaking, I thought of some articles. I read the articles “Philosopher’s Put Their Minds to Expanding Their Role in Public Affairs,”³³⁸ “Can Philosophy Still Produce Public Intellectuals,”³³⁹ and “Should

338. Berrett, Dan. “Philosopher’s Put Their Minds to Expanding Their Role in Public Affairs,” <http://chronicle.com/article/Philosophers-Put-Their-Minds/130066/> (accessed June 19, 2014).

339. Lachs, John. “Can Philosophy Still Produce Public Intellectuals,” http://philosophynow.org/issues/75/Can_Philosophy_Still_Produce_Public_Intellectuals (accessed June 19, 2014).

Philosophers Apply Ethics.”³⁴⁰ Those articles you sent me from the *Chronicle of Higher Education*³⁴¹ were somewhat interesting, but perhaps they are too little too late after all, with the exception of the present company. No one really wants to be a philosopher. (Winking a knowing wink at his friend.) Just to be candid with you, I know you are going to try to convince me otherwise and I am open to be convinced, but really is not the discipline really irrelevant? After all, don’t you remember what Douglass Mann asserted when he said that?

The fate of Philosophy in the Anglo–American world in the 20th century was to forget the lessons of history and to bind itself (largely thanks to the analytic school of thought) to a universal and objectivist project that was hopelessly flawed from the very start. The sad result of Philosophy’s adherence to this project was the professionalization of Philosophy in universities. A professionalization that has significantly tied the discipline to corporatist (in John Ralston Saul’s use of the term) interests that have served to denude Philosophy of a vital, critical role as the center of social, political and cultural debate and critique.³⁴²

I also do not understand how these articles remotely relate to your interest in a so-called Black Philosophy.

Goines: In my undergraduate days, I used to be a mover. And I remember discussing my major with one of my colleagues, and he flat out said, “What’s the point of paying money in college to major in a field where you can’t get a job?” Now here he was referring to Philosophy and Ethnic Studies and other fields, which he said were peripheral majors. Now, when you say that you are an architecture major, the general populous know that more than likely, you’ll become a what?

Agape Marie: Architect.

340. Gaus, Gerald. “Should Philosophers ‘Apply Ethics’?” *Think*: 63, (2009): 63.

341. In all actuality, only one article is from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

342 “Forgetting the Lessons of History: The Fate Philosophy in the 20th Century,” <http://home.comcast.net/~crapsonline/Library/fateofphilosophy.htm>.

Goines: When you are a Political Science major, not always, but by and large, you are likely to become a what?

Agape Marie: A lawyer, right?

Goines: If you are majoring in pre-med, you are likely to become a what?

Agape Marie: A doctor, ok I get it. I see your point, but could not the same thing be said for the person who is a Philosophy major? If you are going to major in Philosophy, then you are more than likely going to become a philosopher.

Goines: That is partially true. The difference between those professions³⁴³ and Philosophy, in my estimation, is that when someone says they are going to be an architect, although one might not know specifically what an architect is, they have a general conception of what an architect does. I know they do something with the construction of the built environment. In fact it makes sense to me, Agape, that you, who grew up in a housing project with dilapidated buildings everywhere like I did, wanted to become an architect, much like my sister wants to be a lawyer, and the other is in law enforcement. When someone says they want to be a philosopher, the ambiguity of the enterprise, on its face, renders it almost unintelligible. By and large, the only thing that is associated with being a philosopher is to be thought to being a thinker. But the pecuniary pay off might not be so obvious. Think about it this way, in the world of art, there is a many millennia long debate about whether the significance of art is “art for art’s sake” or is art’s significance in its utility as propaganda. Now the reason why I bring this up, for our present conversation, is that in a capitalistic society, by and large things are deemed valuable only as far

343. Larson, Magali Safarti, “The Development of Modern Professions: Monopolies of Competence and Bourgeois Ideology,” PhD Dissertation (Berkeley: UMI, 1961). PVI. In a previous unpublished paper drafted by the author for completion of an independent study, I argued that the social phenomenon that was prevalent but not limited to the early half of the 19th century (known popularly as the age of professionalism) developed along lines that were exclusionary. The author further concluded that this barring practice was intentional and chiefly practiced by the cultural and economic elites within this society. Their logic for exclusion was based primarily on derogatory racialized characterizations. My assumption in that effort was that favorable professional, social and economic conditions underlie the emergence of the age of professionalism. It was my view then, as it is now, that we must first begin with a framework for analysis that is structured around the foundational question of “What is professionalism?” or rather what constitutes the professional project.

as they provide some type of economic pay off. Even education is looked at in terms of its exchange value.

Agape Marie: I can see that; I understand what you are saying. That does make some sense. Possibly, Goines, I think also, maybe the subtext for the comments made to you when you were young by, as you say, the “Steve Harvey look-a-like,” is the unspoken tension in the Africa-American community about education. It thinks there is an antagonistic relationship in the Black community. I imagine that this is particularly, though not exclusively, an issue that pertains to the Black community. But I do imagine that so called “poor White Trash folks”³⁴⁴ face a similar tension between educational pursuits for individual pleasure versus pursuing educational outcomes based on their general utility to the community from which one comes. For example, as you stated earlier, I am going to be an architect.

Though architecture, originally for me, was a place in which I could be creative, that is why I loved design studio so much; but now, as an almost practicing architect, I have learned to forget everything I learned in graduate school. Even with that said, I still do architecture because I see it providing a benefit to the larger community that I come from. This benefit is not in terms of cerebral or pie-in-the-sky ideas; it is far more tangible. When a building gets built, or a dilapidated house gets fixed, I truly feel that I am making a difference. So, I think, perhaps, you

344. Harrington John. *Racial situations: class predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999. In this text, the author examines the concept of White trash in his seminal text *Racial Situations*. Harrington succinctly states the power of socially changed terminology in the following:

White trash operates in a racialized setting where fairly drastic economic changes are also underway it would be easy to assume that such usage operates as a smoke screen for more fundamental racist sentiments, but such an assumption requires an assertion of the primacy of racial matters over class distinctions. It is more important to stress the relentless alteration between stresses on class and on race that mark social exchanges in the United States. In this regard it seems White trash is used in a racialized context where class and race difference become conflated overlapping rather than remaining clear and distinct while White trash emphasizes a certain sense of class threat and contempt it does so in a situation where the cultural boundaries between Whites and Blacks become unstable. White trash also retains a strictly racially edged and can serve as a means of insisting upon the difference between Whites and Blacks.”

In deconstructing Harrington’s arguments one can gain tremendous explanatory value as to the social cultural meaning of the term White trash. His work clearly indicates the multiple meanings that are imbedded in so-called “loaded” terminology. I never use this term as it is extremely ugly and I would argue very racist as the implication of the word is rooted that the sentiment that the White person who occupies this station is so defective that they might as well be Black it is also in my view a testament to generally speaking that Whiteness is a better hand to have.

also need to consider that maybe the perception of the philosopher is that they are narcissistic and impractical. As living in the world of ideas though provides some very great intellectual stimulation, but how does it lead to community betterment?

Goines: Sister Agape, you are certainly right. Those of us who come from socially oppressed groups, whether it is because of race or economic standing, do have an obligation, if we are willing to accept it, of broadening access to others who we perceive. Let me put it to you this way: You know I grew up in the church, and I think there are ways that we can understand issues in the church and in the larger society through understanding certain forms of philosophical methodologies. I remember one time, reading an article about Angela Davis, and the interviewer asked her about her field of inquiry, which is Critical Theory.

He wanted to know what particular utility, as a philosophical framework, Critical Theory could be used to help ameliorate the suffering of Black people in the United States. Her response was very enlightening to me, as Professor Davis articulated a conception of Philosophy that was very seductive to my young ears. She said:

Critical Theory envisions Philosophy not so much as an abstract or general engagement with questions of human existence; rather it envisions a productive relationship with Philosophy and other disciplines. For example Sociology, Cultural Studies, Feminist Theory, African American Studies and the use of this knowledge in products to radically transform society. Critical Theory as formulated and founded by the Frankfurt School, which included Horkheimer and Marcuse has as its goal the transformation of society, not simply the transformation of ideas, but social transformation and thus the reduction and elimination of human misery. It was on this basis of this insistence on the social implementation of critical ideas that I was able to envision a relationship between Philosophy and Black liberation.³⁴⁵

This always struck a resonant core with me.

345. Yancy, George. "Angela Davis." In *African-American philosophers: 17 conversations*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Also let us consider two of my favorite philosophers, Cornel West and James Cone. Now both of these men have for me been veritable godsend, as they both embody sharp philosophically oriented minds. Both of these brothers are incredibly bright and they use their intellect as a means to buttress their faith. They do this in a way which I find thought provoking: both men consider themselves concerned with making society for all people in general and Black people in particular qualitatively different. Cornel West is arguably the preeminent public intellectual in the United States today. He has so many accolades, it would take me far longer to list them than this cigar allows. James Cone is Cornel West's intellectual hero, which is amazing. Let me put it this way, James Cone is my hero's hero. He is quite possibly the most well respected professor at the country's most socially progressive theological seminary, Union Theological Seminary in New York. He is also the founder of Black Liberation Theology.³⁴⁶

I think that both of these men of the faith have done a lot for Black Folks in terms of legitimating theological conversations as forms of philosophical discourse. Both men have pointed out about the overlaps between, say, more conventional forms of philosophical discourse. For example, both men talk about the overlaps between Black liberation Philosophy and Marxist analysis.

This phenomenon is so because both orientations focus on the plights of oppressed peoples. West further elaborates that there are three characteristics which Black Liberation Philosophy and Marxists share. He argues first, they both adhere to a similar methodology; that is to say, the way in which they approach their subject matter and arrive at conclusion is similar. Both groups use the dialectical method. Well remember dialectical method entails the thesis/antithesis synthesis. Or to put it another way, both Black Liberation Theology and Marxist thought operate at the level of negation, preservation, and transformation, which are targeted towards unmasking of falsehoods. Both reflect a view about religious thought that must be digested, decoded, and deciphered. Black Theologians underscore the importance of the social context of theological reflection. Black theologians underscore the importance of the social context

346. Cone, James H. *A Black theology of liberation*. [1st ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970]. See also "Black Liberation Theology, in its Founder's Words," *NPR*, accessed DATE, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89236116>.

of theological reflection. Black theology presumes the Biblical truth that God sides with the oppressed and acts on their behalf. Subsequently, the Black historical experience and Biblical text form a symbolic relationship each illuminating the other. Black theologians lack of a clear-cut social theory preventing the emergence of any substantive political program or social vision.³⁴⁷

Agape Marie: I have read that article. The most important part that I found was West's point about the dichotomy for Black Folks about liberation and inclusion. Marxist thinkers are able to present this sketch of human liberation primarily because they stress what people must liberate them from. This suggests what liberation Marxist thought like Black theology does not elaborate on the ideal society. This is so because a dialectical methodology does not permit such elaboration. (Or rather, it makes such elaboration difficult.) Without a clear-cut social theory about what "is," it is difficult to say anything significant about what can be. The possibility of liberation is found only in the depths of oppression one of the most attractive features of Black theology is its indictment of racist American society.

Goines: In all of this, Black theologians were arguing that American theology or White theology is deficient because it systematically omits the Afro-American experience. American theology contradicts its announced goal of universality in its ahistorical blindness. In so far to many existences, it is a reflection of the capitalistic system and repression of the larger society. How else do you get the prosperity gospel notion that forwards that Jesus wants you healthy, wealthy, and wise?

Agape Marie: Do you remember when you introduced me to the idea that once you get the pattern down for a particular phenomenon, you can solve most problems? So let us look at my own field, architecture. In 1857, Illinois was the first state in the USA to adopt a licensing law for architects. Nathan Clifford Ricker, who established the first four year college

347. West, Cornel, and Abdul Alkalimat. "Black Theology and Marxist Thought." In *Paradigms in Black studies: intellectual history, cultural meaning and political ideology*. Chicago: Twenty-first Century Books and Publications, 1990.

curriculum at the University of Illinois, got the state of Illinois to switch its licensing requirements in 1871 to be in line with the U of I's curriculum. To make it short and sweet, in order to be licensed, one had to know the curriculum at the University of Illinois. This pretty much ended the traditional way most folks prior to 1850 became architects, that is, through apprenticeships and/or going overseas. If you wanted to be an architect in Illinois, in say 1900, you had to attend either Illinois or the Illinois Institute of Technology. That's the funny thing about history, particularly as it pertains to professions like architecture or law. The move to the university actually proved to be less egalitarian in that once the university became the site of entrance to a field, things became less inclusive.³⁴⁸ As we know, the move away from the apprenticeship meant one had to study full time, and this was a luxury that was very widespread until the advent of the GI bill for many Americans.³⁴⁹ Let me show you what I mean. Were there more Black lawyers 35 years after the Civil War or 75 years post the Civil War? In 1940 or 1900, which year had more Black lawyers practicing law in the state of Mississippi?

Goines: Well, because in 1954 the Brown decision was handed down. And 1940 is a mere fourteen years removed and 1954 is of course 54 years from 1900. In 2002, we are better off than 1954 in most areas of racial progress, so I will say it was more in 1940. There were more Black lawyers in Mississippi in 1940 than there were in 1900.

Agape Marie: Wrong! There were more in 1900. I will show you why: In 1912, the ABA admitted three Black lawyers by accident. The next year the ABA required potential lawyers

348. For a detailed account of the connection between the professional association and institutions of higher learning's dubious history see Roithmayr, Daria "Deconstructing the Distinction Between Bias Merit," *La Raza Law Journal* (1998): 363 and also "Barriers to Entry: The Market Lock In Model of Discrimination," *Virginia Law Review* 86, no. 4 (2000): 727-799. In both of these works Roithmayr draws on historical data to show the intimate connection between professional associations and calling for the closing of night time law school programs and legal apprenticeship as entrance points to the field of law. She makes the argument that the move from the aforementioned programs to the University became a chief barrier to the pursuit of law by Black, Latinos, and various off- White categories.

349. Katznelson, Ira. *When affirmative action was White: an untold history of racial inequality in twentieth-century America*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005.

identify themselves by race. In 1890, White southerners began to renegotiate with Blacks about Reconstruction “rights.” [Said sarcastically.] Simply put, the rules of the game changed more dramatically in the years between 1900 and 1940. I was pretty sure you were not privy to this information. Much like Amos Potter Scruggs, who is listed as the 14th African-American student at the University of Illinois and was the first African-American graduate of the College of Law.³⁵⁰

Now assuming one did go to the law library, they would be greeted by a rather large self-congratulatory plaque that those school has a record of Amos Potter Scruggs, the University’s College of Law’s first African-American graduate in 1917. Assuming that the student had to use the restroom, they would be greeted by a two corridor long-hall, which has every graduating class of the college history memorialized in photos. Before 1917 not a single person of color is seen in these photos, but even more telling is that one does not see a Black or brown face amongst the numerous folks pictured in any substantive numbers until the 1970s.

My point here is I think your analysis is missing something that is glaring and that is the contributions of Black Women . All the folks you have listed so far are men. Are there no women who you read? Is it true that all the women are White and that all the men are Black,³⁵¹ particularly in light of the fact that women philosophers³⁵² in general and Black Women in particular have been in the news lately.³⁵³ I would like to hear your thoughts on the unique positionality of Black Women .

350. “Illinois Law School News,” *Illinois Law*, <http://www.law.illinois.edu/news/article/941>.

351. Carroll, Constance M., and Gloria T. Hull. “Three’s a Crowd: The Dilemma of the Black Woman in Higher Education,” In all the women are White, all the Blacks are men, but some of us are brave: Black women’s studies. Old Westbury, N.Y.: Feminist Press, 1982. This foundational text in and on Black feminism is often overlooked by White women and Black men alike.

352. “What is it like to be a woman in philosophy?” What is it like to be a woman in philosophy? <http://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/> (accessed July 6, 2014).

Goines: Well, first I would say that there are two camps that I would classify as very similar to Critical Race Theory. I would call them first wave and second wave; some would maybe find it more appropriate to call the camps trailblazers and second wave. For example, we know first wave, Critical Race Theorists like Derrick Bell,³⁵⁴ Richard Delgado,³⁵⁵ Patricia Williams,³⁵⁶ Kimberlee Williams Crenshaw,³⁵⁷ and Mari Matsuda,³⁵⁸ are the folks who set the framework originally after their split from Critical Legal Studies. The second wave scholars I would consider to be folks like: Gloria Ladson Billings, William Tate,³⁵⁹ Adrienne Dixon,³⁶⁰ Laurence Parker,³⁶¹ Tommy Curry,³⁶² and others who extended the insights of the first wave folks to disciplines like education. The trailblazers of Black womanist Philosophy are in my

353. Pateman, Carole. *The sexual contract*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988. In this very influential yet widely under read book, Carole Pateman uniquely challenges the way contemporary society functions by questioning the standard interpretation of an idea that our rights and freedoms derive from the social contract elucidated by Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau and interpreted in the United States by the Founding Fathers. The author shows how we are told only half the story of the original contract that establishes modern patriarchy. The sexual contract is ignored and thus men's patriarchal right over women is also glossed over. Of particular value to me in this current study is the extent to which this is the pioneering work which sets the theoretical frame for Professor Charles Mills' magisterial text *The Racial Contract*. See Mills, Charles *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997). In this text, which should in all likelihood be included in the corpus of Critical Race Theory, Mills argues that racism is at the core of the "social contract;" rather than racism being an unintended result attributed to the failings of imperfect men. Specifically, the Racial Contract is a tacit and at times explicit agreement among members of the tribes of Europe to assert, promote, and maintain the ideal of White supremacy as against all other tribes of the world. For additional reading on this see "White Ignorance," in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, eds. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana, eds. (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007), 13-38. Also see Mills. "A Companion to African-American Philosophy (Blackwell Companions to Philosophy) in *White Supremacy*, eds. Tommy Lott and John Pittman (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

354. Bell, Derrick "Who's Afraid of Critical Race Theory?" *University of Illinois Law Review* 114, no. 4 (1995): 893-910.

355. Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic. "Critical Race Theory: An Annotated Bibliography," *Virginia Law Review*, 79, no. 2. (March 1993): 461-516.

356. Williams, Patricia J. *The alchemy of race and rights*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991.

357. Crenshaw, Kimberley "Race, Reform and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Anti-Discrimination Law," *Harvard Law Review* 101 (1988): 1331.

358. Matsuda, Mari "Looking to the Bottom: Critical Legal Studies and Reparations," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 22, no. 2 (1987): 2-32.

359.. Ladson-Billings, G.J and W.F. Tate, "Toward a Theory of Critical Race Theory in Education," *Teachers College Record*, 97 (1994):47-68.

360. Dixon, Adrienne D., and Celia K. Rousseau. *Critical race theory in education: all God's children got a song*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

361. Parker, Laurence, Donna Deyhle, and Sofia Villenas, eds. *Race Is, Race Ain't: Critical Race Theory and Qualitative Studies in Education* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999).

362.. Curry, Tommy "Shut Your Mouth When You're Talking to Me: Silencing the Idealist School of Critical Race Theory through a Culturalogic Turn in Jurisprudence," *Georgetown Law Journal of Modern Critical Race Studies* 3, no.1 (2012): 1-38.

view: Adrian Piper, Naomi Zack, Michelle Moody-Adams, Anita Allen, Joy James, Angela Davis, and last but certainly not least, Joyce Mitchell-Cook.

Agape Marie: Wait a minute. Is that not just the seven from your book?

Goines: Yes, but before we get into it, let me ask you something as an architect. When majority schools want to get undergraduate or graduate schools where do they go?

Agape Marie: Well, at this fair institution, they go to the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, Tuskegee University and North Carolina A&T. I was the lone Black Person in my graduate architecture program who was an alum of this fine institution of higher learning. As you know, all three of these schools have very strong relationships with the SROP and reciprocity argument with the university.

Goines: Who are now the most influential forces in our society that have pushed society to become more diverse? (Asked rhetorically) The universities and big businesses, of course! This came about because the government used its coercive powers to make this so. It is ironic that the two institutions that have had perhaps the most unfavorable history of discrimination are now leading the pack for diversity and inclusiveness. None other than society's elite champions the diversity argument today. Take for example, arguably the two most influential books in this genre of thought. *Not All Black and White*³⁶³ by Christopher Edley Jr.³⁶⁴ and *The Shape of the*

363. Edley, Christopher F. *Not all black and white: affirmative action, race, and American values*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1996. Former member of Clinton administration talks about race relations and how Affirmative Action must be altered if it is to survive the scrutiny of the public. Christopher Edley, Jr. became the dean of the U.C. Berkeley School of Law (Boalt Hall) in 2004 after 23 years as a Harvard Law professor. His academic work is primarily in the areas of administrative law, civil rights, education policy, and domestic public policy generally. Edley served in White House policy and budget positions in the late 1970s under President Jimmy Carter and in the 1990s under President Bill Clinton. His Clinton service included time at the Office of Management and Budget, where he oversaw the budgets and legislative policy initiatives for five cabinet departments and over 40 independent agencies, with budget authority totaling in the hundreds of billions of dollars. He has held senior positions in five presidential campaigns, including his part time service during 2007-08 as a senior policy adviser for candidate Barack Obama, whom he taught at Harvard Law.

364. Though not the focus of this text, it might be argued that Christopher Edley Jr. becoming Dean of Boalt Hall was another example of interest convergence, as he became the dean after Proposition 209. The legislative initiative barred race among other factors as being a consideration in university admission in our nation's most populace state. The author thinks that the big name or the academic superstar higher is far easier to do than actually devote time and resources to improving retention and recruitment of minorities.

*River*³⁶⁵ by William G. Bowen and Derek Bok. “The most commonly used strategy to recruit students into graduate programs from underrepresented populations is to establish a pipeline partnership between a minority-serving institution and a majority-serving institution.”³⁶⁶

Back to that book,³⁶⁷ it is a classic; it is very well balanced in that seven of the seventeen were women. Let me be clear, the number of African Americans holding PhDs in Philosophy, academia’s oldest discipline, is approximately 100 or one percent. Approximately thirty of the 100 African American PhDs in Philosophy are female.³⁶⁸ Even though seven women in some sense seem like a relatively small number, remember there are literally only thirty Black Women who hold PhDs in Philosophy in the United States. So the seven trailblazers account for a little under twenty-five percent of the Black Women philosophers that are part of the reason that anyone who is interested in this topic must spend a consider time studying *African-American Philosophers: 17 Conversations*, a work that forever altered the trajectory of my life in a profound way. To use urban Black linguistic parlance, “Keep it 100 with you.” This book saved me. I fell in love with the possibility of being both Black and a philosopher. That’s the power of exposure to a young, pliable and impressionable mind, as I was in my twenties when I first read Yancy’s book. I carried it around so much that it functioned as a “secular scripture” for me. In

365. Bowen, William G., and Derek Curtis Bok. *The shape of the river: long-term consequences of considering race in college and university admissions*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998. This book contains the most comprehensive statistics and commentary on Affirmative Action in higher education and the work world it is an invaluable resource to anyone who wants to become seriously informed about this most controversial of issues.

366. “A Model Program at The University of Memphis,” <http://www.cgsnet.org/cgs-occasional-paper-series/memphis-university/part-4>. According to this source, the students are targeted early in the undergraduate programs and invited to seminars and research forums at the destination institution. The pipeline partnerships tend to be mutually beneficial in the following ways: a) they tend to generate research collaborations and exchanges between faculty coordinators at both institutions, b) prospective graduate students from the minority-serving institutions have an early opportunity to interact with and be mentored by current graduate students who are nearing degree completion and witness first-hand the success of their peers, and c) students at both the majority and minority-serving institutions become advocates and ambassadors for diversity and actively recruit their peers into the doctoral program. Dr. Robert Bernasconi worked initially to establish the pipeline with Spellman College, and now that feminist philosophy and race theory are focus areas of the scholarship in the Department, women and African American students enter the University of Memphis from different portals. Equally important is the fact that the applicants to this program have some of the highest GRE scores and grade point averages at the university. This is truly a network of scholars, and this model served as the basis for the CGS/Peterson’s Award for Innovation in Promoting an Inclusive Graduate Community that the University of Memphis received in 2006.

367. Yancy, *17 Conversations*.

368. “A Model Program at The University of Memphis.”

one of his sermons, Reverend Jeremiah Wright asserted that “one can’t be what one has never seen. For many of my young men, they have never met a Black man with two or three degrees.”³⁶⁹

The discipline of Philosophy is no different. Exposure is the key. The trailblazers are women such as Joyce Mitchell-Cook, who is the first Black woman to have a PhD in Philosophy. She earned her PhD from Yale in 1965. Adrian Piper, who is the first Black woman to receive tenure in a Philosophy department, got a PhD from Harvard. Dr. Anita Allen is the first Black woman to have a PhD in Philosophy and a JD. She went to Harvard Law and received PhD from Michigan (she remains one of only two Black Women who have a PhD in Philosophy and a JD; the other is a second wave scholar, Dr. Tina Fernandez Butts). We have Naomi Zack, who did her work at Columbia, Michelle Moody-Adams, a Yale PhD, Joy James, who did her PhD at Fordham and the last of the seven is Angela Davis, who we know had her graduate work seized by the FBI. She also received a doctorate from the University of Berlin. The second wave of Black Women shares some similarities to the trailblazers and some distinctions. Trailblazers all by and large went to upper echelon Ivy or public Ivy level graduate institutions. This is after going to Ivy undergraduate schools or Ivy League feeder schools.

The second wave or the Memphis model generation all come from equally well-educated and middle class families, but the majority of them went to HBCUs, namely Spellman. For example: Denise James, Anika Mann, Kris Seally, Kristie Dotson, and Kathryn Gines all went to Spellman. All had the expectation of Denise James then left Spellman to enroll at the University of Memphis. We know that the Memphis model moved to the Pennsylvania State University; currently the department has ten graduate students who are Black Women enrolled in its PhD

369 Moyers, Bill. “Jeremiah Wright.” PBS. <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/04252008/watch.html> (accessed April 17, 2014).

program. Well technically it is nine, as Camisha Russell is the first Black woman to receive a PhD in Philosophy from this university, as she also went to Spellman.

As Linda Martin Alcoff states,

clearly here she is referring to the Memphis-Penn State Model The University of Memphis PhD program in Philosophy, for example, is well known for producing African American women philosophers in particular. There is a critical mass phenomenon that helps this work. It does not necessarily augment the national standing of the department. I was accused a few years back by a colleague of wanting to “bring down” the Syracuse Philosophy department to the level of Memphis, a charge that was interesting in light of the success of Memphis in its numbers of African Americans.³⁷⁰

She is right that it is interesting as her own colleagues did not want to be “brought down” to Memphis level, but it is very telling to me that her colleagues think the Memphis status was low due to the number of Blacks and women associated with the program. If one thinks about it, this might be looked at in terms of the interest convergence thesis. I do not want this to be seen as me “hating” on Dr. Robert Bernasconi, as he appears to me to genuinely make Philosophy more open to so-called out groups.

As you know, I am a Critical Race Theorist and one of our foundational concepts is the Interest Convergence thesis, where we believe that the power brokers of this society will only forward programs that benefit minorities if it is in their interest to do so. In my view, when we look at what transpired at Memphis, I would contend that my most accepted measures of student quality (the Spellman graduates had the highest grade point averages and standardized test scores of the entire Philosophy department at Memphis) by agreeing to a relationship with Spellman. Memphis was getting by and large to a caliber of student who would, in all likelihood, have been able to get into an Ivy League, and far more prestigious schools, than the University of Memphis. By establishing this effort, I want to make it clear that what transpired at Memphis was not a

370. “Martín Alcoff, Linda. “WHO’S AFRAID OF IDENTITY POLITICS?” Linda Martín Alcoff. <http://www.alcoff.com/> (accessed April 17, 2014).

program in the general sense we like to think of a program. They did allocate funds for minority students, which I would argue that the Spellman graduates would have gotten anyway and know because of this alleged commitment you get all of them.

The University of Memphis gained national attention and won several awards for its work in creating Black Women philosophers by doing this. It in fact raised the profile of not simply the Philosophy department, but the university as a whole. Think about it. You have the brightest and most well-educated Black Women in the United States saying that for graduate education they were considering the Ivy Leagues, Stanford, Emory, Northwestern, the University of Chicago, and the University of Memphis. One of those names seems to be out of place, but if you are Memphis, I would think one would be pleased as punch. I would argue that Penn State will be the beneficiary of a similar phenomenon as well, and it might even benefit more as it is a public Ivy school. Now that the Philosophical Gourmet Report ranks the Philosophy of race as a sub category of Philosophy, Penn State will garner the attention that once belonged to Memphis.

It is interesting that the two institutions known for strengths in both feminist and Black Philosophy of race are unranked by the rankings index of the field.³⁷¹ Dr. Bernasconi is a very interesting character as he had a very comfortable and sufficed care at the University of Essex. Before he came to the United States, he was very well known for his work in 19th and 20th century continental Philosophy, but upon arriving at the University of Memphis, his star seemed to really take off. By his own admission, it is not just because he has written about the Philosophy of race. I enjoy his work tremendously. I am not a racist in this regard when White academics talk of race in a sophisticated and well thought of way. I think it is better for all parties involved, but as Dr. George Yancy states:

371. "Lieter, Brian. "The Philosophical Gourmet Report 2011: Overall Rankings." The Philosophical Gourmet Report 2011: Overall Rankings. <http://www.philosophicalgourmet.com/overall.asp> (accessed April 17, 2014).

Unlike Tamara K. Nopper,³⁷² I do not think that being a White antiracist as such is an oxymoron, though I do hold that White antiracists are indeed racists. There is nothing contradictory in that statement. Being a White antiracist and yet being racist are not mutually exclusive. Rather, being a White antiracist racist signifies tremendous tension and paradox, but not logical or existential futility.³⁷³

Though his British and gentlemanly sensibilities would forgo him identifying himself as one, he does generally strike me as an anti-racist White person. My sense is that he would not like to be grouped with the likes of Noel Ignatiev (who is a devotee of CLR James), David R. Roediger (whose most famous work pays homage to W.E.B. Dubois' concept introduced in *Black Reconstruction in America*) or Tim Wise. Dr. Bernasconi has made his mark and become one of the most revered and sought after folks in the modern academy because of the work he did at Memphis. The other folks I mentioned are Marxist-influenced thinkers, particularly Roediger and Ignatiev, who are concerned with changing the character of an institution in a way that Dr. Bernasconi is not, for the abdication of the foreign language requirements which I know from firsthand experience has kept myself and other folks out of Philosophy proper. It might be argued that he knows that no top-tier Philosophy department is going to abandon the standards, so why even try? I get that, but the question has to be asked, as he is really a Liberal and not a Leftist. He is portrayed as an academic Jon Brown, which he is not.

Agape Marie: You are a diabolical hater! Dr. Bernasconi and other White brothers and sisters like him are doing a wonderful thing by helping to broaden a traditionally exclusionary field to more Blacks particularly to more Black Women ; this cannot be a bad thing. I am really surprised at you for this.

372. Nopper, Tamra. "The White Anti-Racist Is an Oxymoron: An Open Letter to 'White Anti-racists.'" *The White Anti-Racist Is an Oxymoron: An Open Letter to "White Anti-Racists"*. <http://racetractor.org/nopper.html> (accessed April 17, 2014).

373. Yancy, George Look, *a White! Philosophical Essays on Whiteness* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2012), 175.

Goines: I'm not trying to hate on Dr. Bernasconi. Again, I like most of what he has done it just seems interesting to me that he is...

Agape Marie: I know that maybe Black Women and meant different things out of graduate education. Sometimes things just are; everything does not have to be a conspiracy theory to you, does it? You are one of those people who would hit the lottery and win \$300 million and complain about the taxes you would have to pay; you are the type who sees insects on roses.

Goines: Yes, you are right, I got you. I know that if you have a hammer, everything looks like a nail, but I just find it interesting that the effort was made at Atlanta University Center, which we know is the largest contiguous group of historical Black colleges in the nation. I get that it is effective, but I do not know why the effort was not focused on Chicago State or Tennessee State, which has a Jericho project designed to increase the numbers of Blacks in Philosophy. Most HBCUs have combined departments, so Philosophy exists in a history and Philosophy department or it is a Philosophy and religious studies department together. One exception to this is Howard University, which to this day is the only HBCU to offer a graduate degree in Philosophy. It is the department where the great Allan Locke, among others, was for years. There is part of me that thinks that one of the reasons this option was not pursued is that Howard only has one female professor of its eight faculty members, or maybe it is easier for some reason to work with a non-male dominated institution. I do not know this to be the case, but it is a legitimate question to ask. There has been much research done about what historically has been the role of the HBCU³⁷⁴ and the efforts to fund educational programs for African

374. Watkins, William *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001).

Americans.³⁷⁵ As I have said before, I am a certain kind of person and Dr. Bernasconi, primarily recruiting from Spellman and Morehouse, certainly gives a certain character to Philosophy. I would say the question might be rightly asked, what type of student is the Spellman woman and to a lesser extent a Morehouse man? And I don't want to be accused of conflating them, but they do share much in common.

For example in the Black community, both colleges are known for the saying "You can tell a Spellman Woman, but you can't tell her much." Or "You can tell a Morehouse Man, but you cannot tell him much."³⁷⁶ These folks are alleged to be the most well-spoken, well-traveled, well-read, and well-dressed Black college students in the country. In Atlanta and larger lore, the Spellman woman is known to believe that they are the embodiment of what a Black woman should be. One Spellman graduate suggests that the social milieu in Atlanta is tired:

You get your hoes from Morris Brown. You get girlfriends from Clark Atlanta. But you get your wives from Spellman College. We understood from the very beginning who could and could not be called a Spellman woman and by default who could and could not be called a real Black woman. In many ways the social practices at Spellman defined Black womanhood as feminine, heterosexual, smart, non-promiscuous, have good relationships with Morehouse men, Christian, and class privileged. For instance, during orientation week at Spellman, incoming students are required to wear dresses the entire week and also until recently they were paired with incoming Morehouse students to foster a sexual/platonic brother and sister relationship.³⁷⁷

Both institutions consider themselves to be and in all likelihood do produce well-dressed, well-balanced, well-spoken, well-traveled, and most importantly for me, well-accustomed to the social and political status quo. My point here is that there is a political side to the politics of

375. Rooks, Noliwe *White Money/Black Power: The Surprising History of African American Studies and the Crisis of Race and Higher Education* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

376. News One. "Morehouse Seeing Beyond the facade." <http://newsone.com/1729705/seeing-beyond-the-facade-of-morehouse-men/> (accessed April 17, 2014).

377. In all likelihood the exception of Morris Brown who was founded by the AME church, most HBCUs were founded by White missionaries who either received their funds from their respective church denominations or from business mavericks like John D. Rockefeller. As a side note, the author's sister Kiara Armstrong-Crankfield attended Morris Brown College. She was the only one of my parent's offspring to do so, as my other two siblings both attended Illinois State University. Though anecdotal as evidence, Kiara said that very few of her classmates were first generation college students.

representation for Black Folks that is liked to respectability. The fact that you thought I was from a higher class than I was actually from means that, tied to the notion of philosopher is a certain perceived ideology, which I do not know if only recruiting from Spellman will produce. Now Dr. Anita Allen is famous for making her role model argument that having more Black professors helps broaden the scope for potential Black students. This is key in a field like Philosophy, in which Black Women are woefully underrepresented. The model has been effective in that of the ten Black Women currently in the Penn State PhD program, only two did not go an HBCU, and only one of the ten is not, in my mind, some way easily linked to a Black philosopher.

For example, Ayesha Abdullah went to Trinity College where Donna Dale-Marrcono is a professor. Ethenia Whye went to Morgan state where Anika Mann is. In summary, my point is that the Memphis–Penn State model has not worked. It is proof that if efforts are made, one can increase diversity, but I think the overall credit and self-congratulatory rhetoric that occurs is not warranted as generally speaking, I would contend Spellman graduates tend to do well in this world, as they are what some would call the “better Blacks.” But even with that being said, several themes emerge from the stories of Black Women that give some explanatory value. They are first racial relevance: by this I mean the issues that occur from racial relevance decided if Philosophy is the type of activity that one can use to give help to the larger Black community. The second is the issue of image: What does the larger cultural image of a Black woman mean to Black Women who pursue this discipline? Thirdly, I see doubt that occurs only upon the interracial encounter. I would like to deal with the issue of relevance. First, it is one you know of very well you spoke to it earlier.

Agape Marie: Ok, I think I know what you mean: The idea is that Black people in general and Black Women more specifically never attend college for graduate education alone. You are

always wanting to do something that will impact the larger community. Architecture, for me was huge. The built environment of the Robert Taylor homes really meant something concrete for me. I wanted to do something that I perceived as a value to the Black community. Before you go on, I think one thing is going to be clear: The majority of these women you talk about are from HBCUs. This allows them to better think about race, I would think, as I do not think you can be in an institution that was created to educate Blacks in a particular way after slavery and not think about race. At least I would not be able to. Remember these are all Black enclaves, so I would think that being in this setting would allow for reflections of race.

Goines: Indeed you are right. I think by and large, the Black Women philosophers who I have studied do think that being products of all Black enclaves made them more amenable to philosophical discussions of race. I agree and my research bears that out. Also what we find is that one of the hang-ups that many of the Black Women face was issue of self-legitimation. For example, Dr. Anika Mann says,

So my love of Philosophy ultimately caused me to forgo a medical career. I think that the obstacles I faced on the road to becoming an academic philosopher were of my own making. I thought Philosophy was too esoteric and that it tended to confine people to the ivory tower in college. I decided I wanted a career that would allow me the ability to make a difference in the African American community. And I did not believe at the time that being a philosopher would allow me to do this.³⁷⁸

Dr. Mann was not alone in this as many others point to this. For example, Anita Allen felt that despite really liking Philosophy, she couldn't rationalize all of the abstractness of much of the discipline, thus she went on after getting her PhD to obtain a JD from Harvard.³⁷⁹ This pressure that many Black Women feel is not just self-pressure; it is not a figment of their imaginations. It is also imposed from the outside. After all, Mann was on her way to being a

378. Yancy, George "Situated Black Women's Voices in/on the Profession of Philosophy," *Hypatia* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2008).

379. Yancy, *17 Conversations*.

medical doctor and even if one's family support is there, it's still not necessarily an easy road to take. Michelle Moody-Adams, who is a Southside Chicago native and one of the very few Black Unitarian Universalists I have ever encountered states that

Unlike most people, my parents were very supportive of my going into the academy, into Philosophy, and leading a life of an intellectual, but I had lots of friends who thought I was being irresponsible. They said, "If you're an intelligent woman and you got this very fancy education, why don't you go and do something that will really be good for other people, particularly for other Black people?" To this day, I struggle with a version of this worry about the practical impact of Philosophy in changing the world.³⁸⁰

Most of the women had a strong feminist streak, which is vital to the conception of their role. It might be said that some of the doubts that plagued them as women, and Black Women in particular, stem from the gendered, and I would also add racial, configuration of the discipline.

For example, Donna MacCrono states:

To want to be Socrates or Plato or whoever your White male embodiment of Philosophy is may seem ambiguous at best and foolhardy at worst. But it's not trivial, especially for Black Women. Anyone who is embedded in the history of Philosophy knows that Philosophy's canonical figures appear as unimitable [sic] figures, but to be a Black woman in Philosophy is an anomaly. We must remember that woman in herself is an anomaly, but to be a Black woman is to be an extreme opposite of Philosophy's canonical figures. The Black woman's intellectual capacity is a philosophical engagement believed to be nothing less than a void. There is at least the roles of Diatom or Antigone as well as others for White woman to use as counter discourse to the canon. Allow me to conjecture here on the image of the philosopher. My White male students may never articulate their aspirations to be Socrates or Plato and yet it is unusual and yet it's not unusual for many of them to think of themselves as purveyors of the tradition; in fact many of them think they are smarter than the men of the canon.³⁸¹

Agape Marie: I agree. I was reading an article recently that brought this very issue to my mind. It was called "12 Architects Who Changed the World;"³⁸² only one was a woman. So I certainly agree with that notion that being the only one of a few makes you not able to see

380. Yancy, "Black Women's Voices,"

381. Ibid.

382. "Architects that Changed the World, *Colorcoat*, (accessed April 17, 2014).<http://www.colorcoat-online.com/blog/index.php/2011/01/12-architects-that-changed-the-world>

yourself in a particular space, then you have the inevitable issues of harassment that occur when working in these spaces. As you were speaking, I also thought about something that you may have come across that you hinted at earlier, which is doubt. It amazed me that in my graduate program, the students from Puerto Rico and the HBCUs seemed to have such confidence in themselves until they got that rejection from the White institutions. I think that speaks back to when you said that because most of these women went to Spellman. They had confidence; they were smart and really able, but the doubts about their abilities and skills came from being Black in a so-called White discipline. Here I am reminded of something that Dubois talked about when he was rejected: the little White girl he speaks about in *Souls of Black Folk*.

He did not know or did not think about being different until he was rejected. This is when he talks about the veil coming into play; it has been my own experience that it is when I have opened myself up to the White world that I face doubts, fears, and rejection that I never knew existed. Remember I am from the south side of Chicago and I was in the top one percent of my high school class, but when I came here to this space, I was still made to feel like I was behind as I did not take Advanced Placement classes because my high school did not have any to take.

Goines: You are right. Even at Memphis some of the second wave graduates felt like folks underestimated their intellectual ability, which is really interesting to me, as by all accounts the Spellman folks had the highest measures in terms of undergraduate GPA and standardized test scores. What is the meaning of a discipline where the best and brightest folks of color are still perceived to be substandard scholars?

Chapter 5

Actions of Affirmation: Combating Stereotype Threat, the Implicit Biases in Philosophical and Legal Education with Suggestions for the Institutional Future

Yes, I could tell you stories that you would not really believe: I can hardly believe them myself. I could try to assure you that “well qualified” Blacks are not in great demand—other than for submitting job applications and responding to pointless “diversity office” surveys. I could dismiss the need for more studies of a type, which basically presuppose that the gross underrepresentation of Blacks in Philosophy is due almost entirely too external factors. But why are we talking about this? The Philosophy profession has clearly spoken: It has no shame regarding its extraordinary Whiteness; and Blacks have virtually no leverage in such an environment. I cannot in good conscience encourage any Black student in the U.S. (or U.K.) to enter the Philosophy profession. The extraordinary few who are determined to go should at least be aware of what awaits them.³⁸³

In the previous chapters of this text, you have read about the incredible blindness of Philosophy with respect to race. I assert that by and large the academic discipline of Philosophy is what I and others have termed a “White Space.” This White Space, I would argue, is both systemic and systematic. It is my sincerest desire that you have learned much about my intellectual biography. At the urging of my committee, I tried to place my own narrative at the center of our analysis through the primary question, how did I become a philosopher? I wanted to unearth here not merely the assertion that I was a philosopher, but that I was a certain kind of philosophical individual. I am committed to a certain type of Philosophy rooted in my three

383. “Is There Any Hope for the Racial Diversity of the Philosophy Profession?” *Leiter Reports*, (accessed April 17, 2014). <http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2011/06/is-there-any-hope-for-the-racial-diversity-of-the-philosophy-profession.html>

biggest influences intellectually. The first of which is the Black intellectual tradition, particularly as it stems from the prophetic the progressive elements in Black Baptist church.³⁸⁴

Secondly, I was intellectually beguiled by the introduction to the Frankfurt School, particularly the work of one Herbert Marcuse.³⁸⁵ The third tributary to my scholarly flow, if you will, is Critical Race Theory, particularly the racial realist school of CRT as originally advocated by its most seminal founding contributor Derrick Bell.³⁸⁶ In chapter two, I sought to give the contours of what I would term my developing intellectual enterprise. In the third chapter of this text, I sought out the task of taking the autobiographical contributions of three Black educational luminaries, namely W.E.B. Dubois, Booker T. Washington, and Fredrick Douglass. Not only was it my attempt to come to these folks' respective philosophies of education, I would contend we, through these thinkers' explication, find many an antecedent to many present day educational conundrums that scholars, activists, and policymakers alike face. In chapter four of this text, I undertook a discussion of what is it like to be a Black philosopher from what might be called the experience of the Black racial subject. Of particular attention for us were the particular locations of Black Women. In this chapter, the locus of our analysis will be on colleges and universities, including graduate and professional schools, and why they should eliminate the over-reliance on standardized tests and other definitions of merit, which have a particular salience for the academic discipline of Philosophy. By now you, the reader, are very familiar

384. Forbes, James who's *Gospel: A Concise Guide to Progressive Protestantism (Whose Religion?)* (New York: The New Press, 2010). See also James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*.

385. Marcuse, Herbert. "*An Essay on Liberation*." (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1969). See also Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1964).

386. Bell, Derrick "*Racial Realism*," *Connecticut Law Review* 24, no. 2 (Winter 1992).

with my characters Cerno and Goines. You know that they have a love of the good life; they smoke cigars and drink cognac.

Imagine if you will that the following conversation takes place in Goines' favorite lounge. Think, if you will, that you are a voyeur in this darkly lit cognac lounge. It is one of the few places in the city that still allows smoking, despite the fact that it is technically illegal, so of course the lifelong friends are enjoying a cigar. Cerno and his friend (Cerno is smoking a Padron Anniversary Family Reserve #46 and his compatriot is enjoying the Padron 1926 #1, sometimes known as the "Baseball Bat" amongst those in the know) are having a meal and taking time to catch up with each other. These two friends love conversing about social justice issues and are very interdisciplinary in their ways of looking at the world. Here we are about to encounter our two heroes as they engage in a conversation about Affirmative Action. Of particular interest to them both is the discipline of Philosophy and standards of merit and how we might understand a better way of diversifying the discipline.

In Which Goines and Cerno discuss Merit Standards, German Cars, and Good Breeding

Cerno: I believe it is time to end Affirmative Action, period. This lounge all but confirms that Affirmative Action is a runaway success. It looks to me that we now know where all the rich African Americans are.³⁸⁷

Goines: What are the grounds on which you base this conclusion?

387. Cerno's statement here is demonstrative of conflating income and wealth. In my estimation, this is all too often an occurrence particular as it pertains to African Americans and other historically marginalized out groups. See Thomas Shapiro "*The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality*." In this text, Professor Schapiro adeptly explicates the tangible connection between, which shaped the context for achievement in the United States. The often used work is distinct in terms of his departure from most sociological studies about assets and race. This phenomenon is so because Schapiro not only focuses on wealth concentration but of wealth accumulation. In his estimation, more importantly, Professor Schapiro contends his study is unique in that it seriously considers utilization of resources. This is so because this provides us tremendous explanatory value by storing the extent to which wealth related racial inequality is still perpetuated and that these troops are transformative aspects and has mechanisms of denials for the White majority. Though the Cerno family is descended from a historically discriminated against ethnic group, consider the extent to which disparate wealth has played a crucial role in his life. When the antagonist took his law school admissions test, he paid for the test and all of the preparation, including a preparatory course. The proceeds he received as graduation gifts. His automobile was secured through a loan his grandmother co-signed on. Though not a wealthy woman by any stretch of the imagination, she has a small business and home she can tap for their accumulated equity. He also graduated from law school relatively debt-free as his grandmother took out a second mortgage to pay for his legal education. Though a product of public schools, Cerno is from a very small town that faces none of the issues of overcrowding and resources that his friend and protagonist Goines had by going to large urban public school and being placed in special education classes.

Cerno: Hear me out! My statement was not the thoughtless conjecture that cable news network pundits offer. You know I am very smart.³⁸⁸ On foremost political issues my views are informed by careful thought and consideration.³⁸⁹ I noticed a preponderance of limited edition higher end German automobiles in the parking lot. I do not own one of those and I work very hard. I went to the right school and scored the highest scores. I have done what a successful (White)³⁹⁰ person is supposed to do.³⁹¹

Goines: So! Jealousy rears its ugly head. I noticed you did take some unusually long glances as we walked in here.³⁹²

Cerno: Do not try to pull that one on me. Hold up, Buster, you know there is not a racist bone in my body. If there were, you and I would not be friends.³⁹³

Cerno: What I am saying is this, I think Affirmative Action and other racial remediation programs have left a stigma on Blacks.³⁹⁴ Take the customers here: many of their White colleagues probably view them as less competent than their White counterparts. I think

388. For an interesting discussion of the racial construction of smartness see Schwitzgebel, Eric "On Being Good at Seeming Smart," *Schwitzsplinters*, (accessed April 17, 2014).<http://schwitzsplinters.blogspot.com/2010/03/on-being-good-at-seeming-smart.html>.

389. Cerno raises a point that I think is pregnant with meaning for policy implications of this and other studies, namely that I must note here that scholars who espouse social justice must start to think about ways to formulate concrete social policy particularly in educational institutions policy implications to correct the impact of both "Stereotype Threat" and "Implicit Biases." This is so because studies now show that one cannot rationalize their way out of these phenomena, as they are not necessarily rational in the way that they actually work in the real world.

390. It must be noted that I read Whiteness into this statement by Cerno, which I think is tied to a particularly type of expectation that while not entirely tied to his being a White male is certainly informed by this subjective positionality.

391. Cerno's point here raises questions in my view about the traditional view of race and meritocratic competition based on the neo classical model of the market for competition of limited resources. Daria Roithmayr in "Deconstructing the Distinction between Bias and Merit," states the following "like firms in the market competition, candidates compete for an opportunity on the basis of ability or merit, which varies widely among individuals. In an efficient market the employer or college the superior candidate based on the candidate's performance on interview, test scores and grades. For markets with limited numbers of opportunities meritocratic competition promotes efficiency it selects applicants who will maximize the value of a job slot or an educational opportunity, achieving the best outcome with limited resources. Conversely race-conscious distribution is understood to be anticompetitive and inefficient because race is not thought to be related to productivity according to the conventional story the color blind market will produce the most efficient outcomes, because it distributes opportunities and resources solely on the basis of ability."

392. See note 317.

393. Ibid.

394. Loury, Glenn C "The Anatomy of Racial Inequality: The Author's Account," *Review of Black Political Economy* 32, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 75.

Affirmative Action placed an insurmountable stigma in many White minds about Blacks. Even you, Goines, play the race card little too much; you are too good for that.

Goines: [Sarcastically] so, it is a currently weak program like Affirmative Action³⁹⁵ that placed the stigma in the White mind.³⁹⁶ My friend, my misguided friend, the stigma in the White mind comes from many players, but I do not think college or employment programs are key amongst them. Cerno, you are a fan of Psychology, I know, so you do not believe in things like Stereotype Threat³⁹⁷ and Implicit Bias.³⁹⁸ For example the subject you and I both love, Philosophy, in fact now has whole websites dedicated to this pressing issue.³⁹⁹ Authors like Jennifer Saul⁴⁰⁰ and Sally Haslanger⁴⁰¹ have both written beautifully about the plight of women (i.e., White women), but to date no one has written explicitly about stereotype and racial minorities. So much of what someone like myself would have to use is the insights of women in Philosophy as a starting point for our discourse and add the narratives of Black Folks. And as we know this attempt can be rather fruitful if engaged theoretically correctly as Charles Mills

395. Bowles, Samuel and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1976). Authors assert, "The classic Laissez-faire doctrine has been largely rejected, in favor in favor of what we call progressive liberalism. The basic strategy of progressive liberalism is to treat troublesome social problems originating in the economy as aberrations, which may be alleviated by means of enlightened social programs. Among these correctives, two standout education and governmental intervention in economic life. Figuring prominently in social theory for liberals who both have become instruments of economic growth. Both it is thought can serve as powerful compensatory an ameliorative forces rectifying social problems and limiting the human cost of capitalistic expansion." It is in this sense that the author considers even the most robust Affirmative Action programs weak as they operate piecemeal any major progress that would be made only through major changes in the capitalistic workings of the educational and economic system. Programs like Affirmative Action, in the author's estimation serve the egalitarian function of the education system.

396. Fredrickson, George *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1987).

397 "Stereotype Threat," *Wikipedia*, (accessed April 17, 2014).http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotype_threat.

398. "Implicit Bias and Social Justice," Open Society Foundations, (accessed April 17, 2014) <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/implicit-bias-and-social-justice>.

399. *Bias Project*, (accessed April 17, 2014).<http://www.biasproject.org/>.

400. Saul, Jennifer "Women in Philosophy: What Needs to Change?" *Implicit Bias, Stereotype Threat and Women in Philosophy*, eds. Fiona Jenkins and Katrina Hutchison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

401. Haslanger, Sally "Changing the Ideology and Culture of Philosophy: Not by Reason (Alone)," *Hypatia*, Spring (2008).

demonstrates with his *Racial Contract*,⁴⁰² which garners insights from Carole Pateman⁴⁰³ and her work *The Sexual Contract*.⁴⁰⁴

I would contend that Stereotype Threat is a problem that minorities and women usually ascribe to, as we know because we have insights by Fanon. This actually is very problematic as this phenomenon affects the most driven college woman.⁴⁰⁵ I think this applies to communities of color and is manifestly multiplied exponentially for woman of color as they occupy multiple stereotyped identities. For example, take the monotonous and, I would say, overwhelmingly male (White) courses like Logic, Philosophy of Science, and Philosophy of Language. These classes generally will be even more White and male than most other Philosophy courses. In all likelihood, women might only be the majority in a class on Feminist Theory⁴⁰⁶ or say Blacks might be more numerous (they will not ever constitute a majority) in a course on the Philosophical Contributions of Blacks, assuming that a given department offers this type of class. When we speak about a subject like Affirmative Action, we cannot be totally blind to how subjective constructs like merit really are. Or consider if I am a prospective graduate student to a Philosophy program and I search the top programs and I do not see any people of color represented on any of the departments' Web pages in the top 50 programs. I would think this constitutes Microaggressions.

For example, Cerno, explain how you got considerably better letters of recommendation than me from professors in whose classes I got better grades than you. And I think that is merely

402 Mills, *Racial Contract*.

403. "Pateman Biography," *UCLA Political Science Faculty*, (accessed April 17, 2014).
<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/pateman/>.

404. Pateman, *Sexual Contract*.

405 Greenwald, A.G. And M.R Banaji, "Implicit Social Cognition: Attitudes, Self-Esteem, and Stereotypes," *Psychological Review* 102 (1995): 4-27.

406. Saul "Women in Philosophy."

at the undergraduate level. These phenomena affect minorities and women in graduate school, in the job market and well into their careers. Stereotype Threat is also particularly problematic as it affects the so-called most driven students amongst women and minorities. This cannot be understated as this means the brightest minority students and women will likely underperform on, say, standardized tests. I believe that unless we take definitive policy steps to remedy these issues, Implicit Biases and Stereotype Threat will become worse as we can't rationalize our way out of that which is irrational.⁴⁰⁷

Cerno: Affirmative Action strips people of their incentive to compete. People need to be able to prove themselves in the market. This world is rough; do you remember what Nietzsche said about weakness:

That lambs dislike the great birds of prey does not seem strange in light only it gives no grounds for reproducing these birds of prey for bearing of with little lambs. And if lambs say to themselves these birds of prey are evil and whoever is least like a bird of prey is good. There is no reason to find fault with this intuition with the exception of the birds of prey, may think it ironic and say we don't dislike them at all; these good lambs we even love them nothing is more tasty than a tender young lamb.⁴⁰⁸

Merit standards are the only objective way that we can assure fairness to everyone? What's wrong with being fair? Plus you and I both know that good White Liberals who support Affirmative Action programs do it out of a sense of paternalism. They secretly tell their White friends that Blacks are helpless. Why would one want to benefit from something like that? They think that Blacks are to a certain extent lesser beings.⁴⁰⁹

407. Wise, Tim "Rationalizing the Irrational: Racism and the Fallacy of Personal Experience," *Tim Wise*, (accessed April 17, 2014).<http://www.timwise.org/2006/07/rationalizing-the-irrational-racism-and-the-fallacy-of-personal-experience/>.

408. Beasley, Monroe C. *The European Philosophers from Descartes to Nietzsche* (New York: Random House, 1992). Fredrick Nietzsche: The Genealogy of Morals Herd Morality. Nietzsche put forward that resentment and weakness caused the Herd to constrain the abilities of the strong.

409. Delgado, Richard *The Coming Race War? And Other Apocalyptic Tales of America after Affirmative Action and Welfare* (New York: New York University Press, 1996). See Ch.1 on Empathy and False-Empathy.

Goines: Are you arguing for some sort racially constructed herd morality? I remember reading about this phenomenon during our Philosophy class. Are you asserting the idea that somehow Affirmative Action is valued by weaker members of our society who are attempting to oppose their constraints on the stronger minority. Cerno!!! I have listened to you. Cerno, why do you not understand? Blacks' insurmountable incompetence in Whites' eyes is because that is how Whiteness is constructed. The tenets of Whiteness are based on all of the things you just mentioned.⁴¹⁰ I have a twofold explanation for my assertion; one is situated in legal history. According to legal theorist Ian Haney Lopez⁴¹¹ in his seminal text *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, the legal construction of Whiteness is the final two key principles, the first one being that Whites as a group are constituted of individuals whose identities are such that they are individuals who belong to groups who are not readily identifiable as non-White. The second principle to the legal construction of Whiteness argued by Lopez is that there is an inherent presumption that being White is superior legally to being Black, or to put it another way, Whiteness is the superior antonym to Blackness. What I am arguing to you, Cerno, is that in its normative theoretical sense, the construct of Whiteness entails that Whites have merit. This is in contrast to the construct of Blacks, which necessarily entails the actions of the aforementioned merit. Now certainly I imagine you and some other Whites might take exception to my assertion here as I am attempting to extrapolate from the particular to the general.

Cerno: You do not think my views are valid; do you, Goines?

Goines: I would contend that racialized consciousness is a trans-historical, ideological, social, and physiological set of beliefs and practices. It has morphed in the United States and to a

410. Lopez, Ian Haney *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1998). Lopez puts forward the major tenets of Whiteness. First, Whites are identities as those who are not non-Whites. Secondly, Whites presume that White is the superior antonym to Black.

411. "Faculty Profiles," *Berkeley Law*, (accessed April 17, 2014).<http://www.law.berkeley.edu/php-programs/faculty/facultyProfile.php?facID=301>.

lesser extent the wider world into what seems to us today to be the natural order of things.

Whiteness in general and the construction of all what nations is a recent historical phenomenon in some respects. In fact I just read a fabulous book entitled *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*.⁴¹² Cerno, Blacks are meritless! Let me explain to you what I mean. Merit simply means worth or value. Western advanced industrial society values four types of merit: Biological merit, Historical Merit, Cultural Merit, and Testocratic Merit.

Cerno: I am waiting to hear what you are going to say.

Goines: Are you at all familiar with the body of scholarship that falls under the rubric Critical Race Theory?⁴¹³ This is the movement of leftist leaning scholars that assert the law, among other things, not only embodies racism, it perpetuates it.⁴¹⁴ They believe that racism is inescapable and a permanent part of the American landscape.⁴¹⁵ Sadly, one of the most underdeveloped areas of engagement is the discipline of Philosophy.⁴¹⁶ This phenomenon is largely so because Philosophy, as a discipline, likes to think of itself as the highest arbiters of reason. I would contend that White philosophers largely see racism and basis as based on a lack of knowledge. The movement has moved into other disciplines, the most surprising of which is education.⁴¹⁷

412. Lake Marilyn, and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

413. Crenshaw, Kimberley *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York: The New York Press, 1995). This work is the foundational text in the Critical Race theoretic canon. The fundamental read of this body of progressive legal scholarship.

414. Bell, *And We Are Not Saved*.

415. Parker, Deyhle, and Villenas, *Race Is Race Isn't*. Text broadens the scope of critical Race Theory and praxis is to the realm of education.

416. "De-radicalization of Racism: How and Why Philosophy Under-Specializes the Development of (Critical) Race Theory," *Racism Review*, (accessed April 17, 2014).<http://www.racismreview.com/blog/2011/11/20/de-radicalization-of-racism-how-and-why-philosophy-under-specializes-the-development-of-critical-race-theory/>.

417. Parke, Deyhle, and Villenas, *Race Is Race Isn't*.

Cerno: I am somewhat familiar with the early writings of C.R.T; I did not know it moved into education. What is that about? On its face, is it similar to the work we did as undergrads; do you remember reading that book called *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life*?⁴¹⁸ These folks posit the primary idea of the “Correspondence Principle,” which basically states that the educational system is set up in such a way that it replicates the workforce. To this end, they assert that the educational system in the United States serves a dual functionality. This role is “in the social processes whereby surplus, that is, profit, is created and expropriated. On the one hand by imparting technical and social skills and appropriate motivations, education increases the productive capacity of workers. On the other hand, education helps defuse and depoliticize the potentially explosive class relations of the production and thus serves to perpetuate the social and economic conditions.”⁴¹⁹ Basically the general idea is that schools are mostly a tool to replicate social oppression.

Goines: Cerno, not to parse hairs my friend, it might be rightly pointed out that Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis are generally not thought of as Critical Race Theorists. Despite this, I believe wholeheartedly that their insights still provide us tremendous explanatory value, particularly for those of us who are interested in the continued validity of Marxist analysis on large social institutions. In fact the educational C.R.T. theorist is doing compelling work. They are looking at the mighty case of Brown vs. The Board of Education how it has changed relatively little in the fortunes of Black school children.⁴²⁰ Black school children, whose plight today is little better today than it was in Brown’s day. The educational C.R.T theorists are

418. Bowles and Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*.

419. Bowles and Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist*

420. It is a widely known fact that the United States public educational system had two primary purposes: 1) Pacification of the masses of society and 2) As a means of social reproduction of dominant values, that is, consumerism and American civil religion.

looking into why Blacks attend more segregated schools today than in 1954.⁴²¹ They are looking at the horrendous graduation and dropout rates for Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans. They are keying on the school choice issue and focusing on the myriad of ways that it is a token program from the ugly social reality that the public school system is indeed succeeding in the primary purpose that it was designed. Public schooling was designed to reproduce social inequalities. If I were willing to wager, the third wave or educational side of C.R.T. may be to C.R.T. what Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School was to Marxism.⁴²² That is to say, its saving grace. Remember the claim of Marcuse that Marxism had to be reclaimed because society had advanced past it. In many ways, that is what educational professionals are using C.R.T. for.

Goines: Cerno, merit is congealed basis. That is to say that merit has a majoritarian quality.⁴²³

Cerno: What do you mean, Goines?

Goines: I thought you said that you were familiar with C.R.T., Cerno. Think about biological race. This concept had a dubious history.⁴²⁴ My ideological concept biological merit very closely linked to it. Biological merit is the belief that natural differentiation in humans has a normative value. This was the claim of many scientists and pseudo-scientists who have all been discredited. Cerno, think carefully about the rhetoric that surrounded the one-drop rule. The rule was based on the belief of racist biologists that believed Black blood in the most minuscule amounts tainted a White person irreparably.

421. Bell, *And We Are Not Saved*.

422. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*. The Frankfurt School consists of the philosophers and social scientists who added Psychoanalysis, that is, Freud, and Existentialism to Marxist Thought.

423. See Daria Roithmayr, *Deconstructing the Distinction*.

424. Carlson, Elof *The Unfit: A History of a Bad Idea* (Cold Spring Harbor, NY: Cold Spring Harbor Lab Press, 2001).

Cerno: Those beliefs have largely been discredited.

Goines: This is both true and not true. I agree if you say that the more blatantly absurd forms are things of the past. The concept of biological value has vestiges today that appear subtler. The Bell curve is an example; in many ways, the renewed interest in Darwinian thought can be seen as a negative sign.⁴²⁵ Cerno, we live in the age of science.

Cerno: Look at the broadly different world science has brought to us.

Goines: Exactly. Most people have faith that what the so-called hard sciences⁴²⁶ produce is fact. If, say, a geneticist or a biologist could prove that Blacks and Whites had naturally occurring capacity on I.Q. tests, racial discriminatory treatment could be legitimated. This reinforces commonly held beliefs by a large segment of the populous as justifiable by nature or worse, some would say God willed it so. This despicable motive is what is at the heart of Murray and Herrnstein's *Bell Curve* movement.⁴²⁷

Cerno: Whatever are you saying!?

Goines: If Blacks are scoring lower on I.Q. tests and it is proven that this gap is genetic and inheritable. You see what the implications will be to the rationalistic Whites. They will begin to mutter amongst themselves that maybe nothing can truly be done about social inequality.⁴²⁸ They can continue to be subtly racist and will not feel any remorse. In fact, they will secretly

425. Herrnstein and Murray, *The Bell Curve*.

426. Goueffic, Louise *Breaking the Patriarchal Code: The Linguistic Basis of Sexual Bias* (Lakefield, ON, Canada: Sapien Books, 2011). This text provides tremendous explanatory value how patriarchy is inscribed in our everyday linguistic practices.

427. Fraser, Steven ed., *Back to the Future with The Bell Curve: Jim Crow, Slavery, and G* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 80-94.

428. Herrnstein, and Murray, *The Bell Curve*.

thank God they are White.⁴²⁹ The mere fact that the Bell Curve became the cultural phenomenon it did is proof that the beliefs in biological merit still persist.⁴³⁰

Cerno: Maybe you are overreacting. This movement cannot mean what you say.⁴³¹

Goines: Think about it like this: You love dogs, right?

Cerno: Who does not? (With a smile to his friend, who does not particularly like animals?)

Goines: The concept of race came about out of dog breeding, a topic near to your heart. Remember you paid \$2,000 for your Mastiff pup, which is twice as much a Bullmastiff pup! Why is this so?

Cerno: First of all, think about it, my baby (that is, the dog) is a pure breed. Her mother and father both won numerous dog shows. You saw her; she has that look of a champion with her bone structure and shoulder girth. She was worth every penny; in fact, I am almost brought to tears thinking about her (wipes an imaginary tear off his face). When I breed her, she will gain me a fortune.

Goines: Okay, answer my second question: why is the Bullmastiff less?

Cerno: A Bullmastiff is a mix of a Bulldog and a Mastiff, so it is not a pureblood dog; it is a mutt. Bullmastiffs are not as big or regal looking. You went with me to the Kennel Club; everybody knows that Bullmastiffs are not as good. It is a Dirty mix. They do not possess the aesthetic beauty the Mastiff has.

429. Ibid.

430. Ibid.

431. Wise, Tim "White Privilege, Racism, White Denial & the Cost of Inequality," *YouTube*, Bowles and Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SIINVfqnxw>. See also James Guillory, "The Pro-Slavery Arguments of Dr. Samuel A. Cartwright," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 9, no. 3 (Summer, 1968): 209-227.

Goines: So there it is. People are not now nor ever will be dogs. Race is a social construct much like merit.⁴³² The mere fact that race in modernity came out of the concept of dog breeding²⁵ should give us pause when talking of it. Remember when we played ball in school? Who was the best player on our team? (Thinking to himself about unconscious racism).⁴³³

Cerno: You were a stud! The beast! You played so gracefully back then; you could run like a gazelle!⁴³⁴

Great White Fathers: In which Cerno and Goines

Discuss Historical Merit

Cerno: I will admit, I am somewhat convinced that no significant biological difference exists between the races.⁴³⁵ I believe your points. I think that a way that merit plays a part in racial conversation is sometimes left unstated.

Say that I define merit to mean accomplishments. Subconsciously most White people think to themselves, what noteworthy things have Black Folks accomplished? Let us be frank, Black people have not accomplished as much as Whites.⁴³⁶ (Smiling with unconscious White pride) This is not racism, this is historical fact!⁴³⁷ It cannot be doubted. What have Black people ever created? I think on some level Whites believe that Affirmative Action benefits people who

432. Rock, Chris *Bigger and Blacker*, Los Angeles, DreamWorks Records, 1999. A thoroughly thought provoking dialogue of White social and cultural values to Whites.

433. *The Bell Curve* was a New York Times bestseller and gained a small yet influential place amongst the White rationalistic wing of the academy.

434. Delgado, Richard Critical *White Studies*. In the world of athletics attributes that draw comparison between Animals and Blacks are routine, in contrast White athletes regardless of how athletic inclined they may or may not be, are referred to as heady or having high sport I.Q.

435. Ross, *Just Stories*.

436. Jacobson, Matthew *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

437. Cerno is echoing a prevalent sentiment in western civilization that dead White males are the sole possessors of the world's notable accomplishments.

do not produce even when given undeserved opportunity.⁴³⁸ (Pauses prior to speaking then looks at his friend in a compassionate way, as if to soften the blow of his upcoming assertions). If one looks at histories of the races, all the great societies, they all have been White. Goines, think about the Greeks, the Romans, the Germans, and finally and most significantly, in my biased view the Americans in the United States. These are the great White societies. Let me rephrase that: These are the great world societies.

Goines: What about the great African civilizations? Egypt is the society that the Greeks patterned most of their so-called accomplishments after. When Ptolemy theorized the circumference of the world almost perfectly, was he not in Egypt? Remember, Cerno, Africa is the motherland.

Cerno: Beethoven, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Rousseau, Machiavelli, Hobbs, Locke, Jefferson, James, and Dewey all were White.⁴³⁹

Goines: When discussing the concept historical merit, we can certainly hold a great deal of currency. This is not merely because the Greeks are thought to be the creators of ancient philosophical insight, but as you have just stated, we also afford certain Greeks such as Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato overwhelming influence, so it is a disciplinary basis from both the general and the particular. For example, we speak of the Greeks, German idealism, French Existentialism, the British Empiricism and in some cases the pragmatic school of the United States. So even though we in the West might not hold a high esteem for Danish Philosophy, one would be rather remiss if he did not speak about the insights of Soren Kierkegaard; or could one do a class on political Philosophy and not mention *The Prince* by Machiavelli? By the way,

438. Horseman, Reginald Race *and Manifest Destiny: Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1998).

439. Cerno is echoing a prevalent sentiment in western civilization that dead White males are the sole possessors of the world's notable accomplishments.

Beethoven, according to the great historian J.A. Rogers, was a biracial man.⁴⁴⁰ What about: Akhenaton, Aesop, Cleopatra, Zenobia, Askia the Great, the Mahdi, and Alexander Dumas, who authored *The Three Musketeers*, Hannibal of Carthage, Carter G Woodson, James Baldwin, Aesop Dubois, Fredrick Douglas, Chaka the Zulu, Madame C.J Walker, Nefertiti, Garret Morgan, or Elijah McCoy, whose very name today symbolizes that which is authentic—all were Black people. Clearly, you have not been educated on the many contributions of Blacks that have helped in enriching the human family. Cerno, I do think that your idea has some merit. No pun intended, of course.

Cerno: Of course not.

Goines: Now you can see part of the problem that comes from the exclusion of people from the larger narrative of society. If schools were not designed to replicate existing relations of power, there would be room for larger inclusion of the Black historical voice. I can recall growing up and feeling that I belonged to a lower class of humanity.

All I ever remember about Black people is that we were in Africa. Whites helped us out by allowing us to come to America by making us slaves. I felt a deep sense of shame from this. I thought I was less because I came from a slave people. This lesson is constantly taught to Black kids and they internalize this. Thus it takes an almost miraculous act for them to ever feel that they can achieve anything of great importance. The doubly problematic issue is that White kids internalize this phenomenon as well so they make the assertion that you made because they do not know any better.

440. For a discussion of the lineage of Ludwig von Beethoven see Rogers, *Sex and Race*.

This is one of my many problems with the schools. Cerno, the fact is that the only totally uniquely United States creations are out of Black culture. If I were taught that Europe was backward a long time too, I would not have let Eurocentrism go unchallenged when I was young.

Cerno: You said that you had four concepts of merit, we have thoroughly discussed two let us move on to Cultural merit and Testocratic merit.

In Which Testocratic Merit and GPA Comes Under Strict Scrutiny!

Cerno: In highly competitive admission enjoyment, the standardized test is the best way to determine merit.

Goines: Standardized tests are nothing more than the test of one's ability to think linearly. They are really proxy for one's inoculation to the larger mores of our society.

Cerno: If that is so, what is wrong with linear thought? If that is what makes me a better student, then that is what I need to know.

Goines: Just because someone can explain to you how to shoot a free throw does not mean they themselves can hit one. The standardized tests were not designed to determine potential success in law school. Neither does it perform an accurate job of predicting post law school achievement. Let me show you what I mean. Were there more Black lawyers 35 years after the Civil War or 75 years post the Civil War? In 1940 or 1900, which year had more Black lawyers practicing law in the state of Mississippi?

Cerno: Well, in 1954 the Brown decision was handed down. And 1940 is a mere fourteen years removed and 1954 is of course 54 years from 1900. In 2002, we are better off than 1954 in most areas of racial progress, so I will say there were more in 1940. There were more Black lawyers in Mississippi in 1940 than there were in 1900.

Goines: Wrong! There were more in 1900. I will show you why: In 1912 the ABA admitted three Black lawyers by accident. The next year the ABA required that potential lawyers identify themselves by race. In 1890 White southerners began to renegotiate with Blacks about Reconstruction “rights.” [Said sarcastically]. Simply put, the rules of the game changed more dramatically in the years between 1900 and 1940. I was pretty sure you were not privy to this information.⁴⁴¹

Cerno: So you asked me a question you were pretty sure I could not answer. That’s not fair!

Goines: That is my point—that is what the standardized test does in a similar manner. It asks people to answer questions in a certain way. My question could have been answered very easily had you been exposed to the information and tools to answer it. I had a pretty good idea of what you would or would not know. I will come back to this point. Notice I said the rules changed.

Cerno: Yes.

Goines: Cerno, why is it that more points are scored in basketball the higher the organizational level?

Cerno: You are going say the rules, are you not? Are you saying that the lower tier schools are analogous to high school and so on? So I imagine the Ivy League and Big Ten schools are the NBA?

Goines: You got it! Think about it: High school games are 32 minutes long, college games are 40 minutes, and NBA ballgames are 48 minutes—that alone causes things to be

441. Roithmayr, “Deconstructing the Distinction.”

different. The NBA shot clock is 24 seconds, college is 32 seconds, and at the high school level, there is no shot clock.

Cerno: That is true but are not the rules the same on each level as it relates to that level? Take the NBA—are not all players allowed only six fouls?

Goines: True in theory, not in practice. You know why? Because in both law schools and basketball, we have referees. The basketball rule for traveling says that one cannot take more than one step without dribbling. In the NBA, when was the last time they called traveling on someone? The average official will never call the sixth foul on LeBron James regardless of what he does. Different referees have different ideas of what behind the three point line means. I know even though it says in the rules that a foot on the three-point line makes that shot a long two pointer, most refs will give it to you if the shot is a close call.

Cerno: That also depends on if one is at home or away. So, what you are saying is that even when rules are formal such as foot on three-point line or the sixth foul, it is still very arbitrary in practice.

Goines: Right. Also, not only just the adherence to the rule, but instituting the rule in the first place. Think about it: When you increase scoring, what you are doing? What is the implied meaning?

Cerno: Huh? I am not sure what you are asking, Goines.

Goines: When the NBA says they want to increase scoring, what they are really saying? The league is saying we need to increase the number of baskets made in the game. If you really want to increase scoring, you put in a shot clock, then you add a three-point line. You remember that in the past if you fouled someone shooting a three pointer that person would get two free throws.

Cerno: That's so right. Dr. Naismith never had the concept of a shot clock in basketball's original rules. Now they get three shots for a foul on a three pointer. If I shoot a three pointer and I am fouled, I should get three foul shots, which never made sense to me. I see what you are saying—if I want to increase the number of three pointers made I move the line closer. That is why college players always have higher shooting percentages in college than when that same person goes into professional basketball because the three point line is back farther in the pros. I see where you going with this...when scoring went up too high, they moved the line back farther and as predicted, scoring went down. Let us look at escalating price of games of NBA games. The higher tickets prices go, the more that certain types of people get squeezed out—that is why stadiums now sells Personal Seat Licenses and have more luxury boxes.

Goines: If you have to pay a fee of, say, \$3,000 to have the rights to purchase a seat, then you are not being exclusionary because anyone who has the money can buy the seats. It is just mere happenstance that minorities and working class Whites are no longer able to take their children out to the see the game.

Cerno: Even though it has the effect of ruling certain people out. I can say that I am fair and not truly be fair in reality.

Goines: Are the lights starting to come on? So the ABA is formed and makes deals with states so that only ABA approved schools automatically qualify you to practice in a state. Then you systematically end the legal education apprenticeship. Close part-time and night law schools, introduce legal theory and case law method, and most importantly, add the ABA's trump card, the Moral Character clauses, which bring new meaning to the word ambiguity. I move the law school to a university setting. This is the key because until very recently in our history,

universities were in practice a privilege that very few members of our society could afford. So in a sense, these factors are analogous to manipulating the three-point line.

Cerno: All this, then, creates a certain type of student and a certain lawyer type. I then create LSAT and standardized tests, both of which I have to pay for. I say that in order to be a lawyer, you must score very high, 160 or better, on the standardized tests, and at the most selective schools, say, 170 or better. By doing this, I have covertly said that you have to take a prep course; I would imagine that very few people can do well absent any test preparation courses. Prep courses are expensive. Say you really need that personal touch and you really want that 180 (180 is a perfect LSAT score), which will overcome a 3.0 GPA. I would spend my money and take the comprehensive course. I took one myself and it got me a 180, alright.

Goines: How much did you pay, may I ask?

Cerno: I paid \$3,000, and I still had a hard time preparing for the test. Okay! I can see that testing is a form of racism, but it appears to be more discriminatory for the poor than a racial basis.

Goines: Cerno, how long have I been telling you that Class is really Race in disguise?

Mascots Never Had Sons and Artfully Crafted Letters of
Recommendation in which Cerno and Goines Discuss
the Importance of the Most Arbitrary Form of Merit

Goines: Cerno, I was thinking about how Cultural Merit differs from the other forms of merit we have talked about. I want to run some ideas that I have by you, but first do you know what a counter-factual is?

Cerno: I certainly do! A counter-factual is a form of historical analysis that asks question premised on the “what if.” The counter factual is a thought experiment that proves a larger point. It asks, what if situation A happened instead of B? How would history be different? How would

have the different occurrence altered a particular person's life? For example, if the South had not seceded, how long would slavery have persisted in our nation?⁴⁴²

What if Lee accepted the North's offer to become commander of the Union's Army? A counter-factual is valid so long as it was somewhat plausible or conditions of facts were similar enough to warrant the question. It would not be plausible to counter-factualize that if Napoleon had B12 Stealth Bombers, he could have won the battle of Waterloo.

Goines: Let me throw a few counter-factuals at you. If Bill Clinton was in fact a Black man literally and not just rhetorically, would he have been our president?

Cerno: Although it pains my color-blind eyes to say this, he would definitely not been president of a bank, let alone our country.

Goines: What was the major factor, in your opinion, that would have kept Colin Powell from being the first Black president?

Cerno: The term first Black president is in itself a misnomer; there will never be a Black president in this currently conservative racial climate,⁴⁴³ if by Black you mean a person who is the progeny of the descendants of slaves. Colin Powell, who I, as a military man myself, love, could not have become president. He had no political experience and he was Black. I, as an enlightened White, may have voted for him, but I am a rarity amongst the conservative wing in that I have! I can't see a Black Person ever winning the popular vote amongst Whites.⁴⁴⁴

442. C.S.A.: The Confederate States of America. Directed by Kevin Willmott. New York: IFC Films, 2005. Using archival data and oral history, this critical film takes a satirically humorous, and sometimes frightening, look at the history of an America where the South won the Civil War.

443. Though some might find this proclamation by Cerno problematic or foolhardy in light of the election of one Barack Hussein Obama on November 4, 2008. Here Cerno is perhaps unwittingly referring to arguments from authors such as Debra J. Dickerson, who in her work *The End of Blackness* argues that by considering someone such as President Obama, Black, the meaning of the term unravels. Though phenotypic ally Black, Dickerson argues that we cannot really, in intellectual integrity, argue that President Obama's Blackness is read in the same way as if he were the progeny of two Black Americans who were descendants of slaves.

444. Here Cerno is making an allusion to the so-called Bradley Effect, a theory proposed to explain observed discrepancies between voter opinion and election outcomes in some United States government elections where a White candidate and a non-White candidate run against each other. This theory asserts that some voters will tell pollsters they are undecided or likely to vote for a Black candidate, while on Election Day they vote for the White candidate. Specifically, some White voters give inaccurate polling responses for fear that, by stating their true

Goines: A high-Negro threshold, as some of your fellow conservatives point out. Think about Powell and Clinton as contrast of the formal criteria for political success. Clinton was a draft dodging Rhodes Scholar. Powell met perfectly an established paradigm that President Grant and President Eisenhower both met. They were victorious generals who, with limited political experience, ran for and won the presidency. Powell's Blackness made him unelectable. I think you are right, my friend; we may never see a Black president. I imagine the only way it could happen is that the Black candidate in question would have to win some unbelievable percentage of the Black and Latino vote. And in addition to this, be able to somehow mobilize enough new voters to come into the process. You are probably right, my friend; it could never happen.

Cerno: Although this is extremely interesting, Goines, I do not see where you are going.

Goines: My point is cultural merit is arbitrary and as such is the most veiled majoritarian merit.⁴⁴⁵ Let me say that Malcolm X should have become a lawyer; if Malcolm little had been White, Mr. Ostrowski would have gladly supported Malcolm's ambition of becoming a lawyer.⁴⁴⁶ The problem of cultural merit is it places values based on widely held social definitions. White privilege is its most covert in this cultural merit realm.⁴⁴⁷

In a concrete sense, Mr. Ostrowski is not a relic of the past. He is very much alive in our present day and age. He was the pragmatic teacher who could not conceptualize the Black Person becoming a lawyer, but helpfully suggested to Malcolm that he take up carpentry. The intelligent

preference; they will open themselves to criticism of racial motivation. Members of the public may feel under pressure to provide an answer that is deemed to be more publicly acceptable or "politically correct" despite popular rhetoric to the contrary. This phenomenon may still hold sway even after the election of President Barack Obama. "Bradley effect," *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bradley_effect. One need only look at 2012 exit polls to ascertain the extent to which this phenomenon was or was not in play; see APPENDIX.

445. Spann, Girardeau "Pure Politics," *Michigan Law Review* 88 (1990).

446. X, Malcolm, and Alex Haley. "Mascot." In *The autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: One World/Ballantine Books, 1992.

447. Roithmayr, "Deconstructing the Distinction."

Black college student today is told to pursue the same realistic goals. Being Black causes one to fall outside of the cultural definition of being a lawyer; that is the lesson of Malcolm's mascot chapter. I have had similar experiences with the White collegiate advisor, who very subtly suggested that I take a less provocative stance. "Remember the goal of your studies is to matriculate, Goines." Cerno, think about the makeup of any Philosophy department of any college outside of the HBCUs; there are no Blacks. Justice O'Connor would probably say, "I guess not too many Blacks want to pursue Philosophy."⁴⁴⁸ The intellectually adapted Negro is a novelty. The smart Latina or Latino is the department-wide mascot. And being a mascot is to reality not being seen. The poor, yet talented, ethnic White is not the mascot. He is White and can be anything he wants to be. Remember that membership has its privileges in our society; Cerno, you can end up president. I, despite any attempt at racial capitulation and assimilation, cannot.

Cerno: How would you define cultural merit? You seem to be saying that as a White person, I, although from Kewanee, Illinois, have a reserve source of cultural capital. How does what you say differ from others?

Goines: First, we have to remember that Malcolm was one of the highest achievers in his classes until he has the moment of implicit bias. Philosopher Eric Schwitzgebel has a brilliant article, a very short but tremendously insightful piece called "On Being Good at Seeming Smart."⁴⁴⁹ Schwitzgebel states:

Since then, I have been collecting anecdotal data on seeming smart. One thing I've noticed is what sort of person tends spontaneously to be described, in my presence, as "seeming smart." A very striking pattern emerges: In every case I have noted the smart-

448. See *City of Richmond v. J. A. Croson Co.*, 488 U.S. 469 1989, 498-99.

449. Schwitzgebel Eric "On Being Good at Seeming Smart," *Schwitzsplinters*, accessed April 17th 2014, <http://schwitzsplinters.blogspot.com/2010/03/on-being-good-at-seeming-smart.html>.

seeming person has been a young White male. Now my sample size is small and Philosophy is about 75% White male anyway, so I want to be cautious in this inference. Women and minorities must sometimes “seem smart.” And older people maybe have already proven or failed to prove their brilliance so that remarks about their apparent intelligence aren’t as natural. (Maybe also it is less our place to evaluate them.) But still I would guess that there is something real behind that pattern, to wit: Seeming smart is probably to a large extent about activating people’s *associations* with intelligence. This is probably especially true when one is overhearing a comment about a complex subject that isn’t exactly in one’s expertise, so that the quality of the comment is hard to evaluate. And what do people associate with intelligence? Some things that are good: Poise, confidence (but not defensiveness), giving a moderate amount of detail but not too much, providing some frame and jargon, etc. But also, unfortunately, I suspect: Whiteness, maleness, a certain physical bearing, a certain dialect (one American type, one British type), certain patterns of prosody—all of which favor, I suspect, upper- to upper-middle class White Men.⁴⁵⁰

My distinction is that to say Whiteness offers a cultural capital is not enough. I will go further; cultural merit is formalized informal traits of familiarity. This formal informal-ness is congealed bias that in highly selective situations such as admissions to prestigious professional schools, Whiteness is a tie breaker. To take hold of the old adage that strangers are friends one has not met, in our society Whites are friends that one has not met. To other Whites, Whiteness is a social form of familiarity. This familiarity is what is analogous to toboggan questions of the past.⁴⁵¹ White familiarity is the human manifestation of the regatta question. It is like a secret club; for me, the question of who seems to be smart certainly has implications for us in Philosophy because this is the first step in the adoption process. Sometimes one’s intelligence can be judged on nothing more than one’s comportment.

Goines: Cerno, do White people eat scrapple? Do White people eat crackling or pickled pig’s feet or pig snout?

450. Schwitzgebel “On Being Good

451. Delgado, *The Coming Race War*. See Ch 4: “Merit and Affirmative Action.”

Cerno: You mean people actually eat snout, the snout of a pig—you know what that thing does?

Goines: Do not miss the point—cultural merit assumes certain links. My sense is that very few Whites have ever eaten a pig's foot or tasted the joy that is hog's headcheese, but say that by some chance, you had come into contact with one of those Southern Black delicacies.

Cerno: A Black Person with roots like mine in the South would in all likelihood have downed not just one, but also all of the following things.

Goines: I was thinking about a couple things.

Cerno: Well let's have it then, Black Guy!

Goines: Are you familiar with the work of Richard Delgado?

Cerno: Slightly; I have read his *Rodrigo Chronicles* and the sequel, *The Coming Race War*.⁴⁵²

Goines: He has put forward the idea that formalistic institutions keep racism at bay. Let me say that I have thought hard about this issue and I agree that formality is the best way to go. Let us compare the military and, say, a PhD program.

Cerno: Interesting selection of choices; why would you pick these seemingly unrelated fields?

Goines: Think about it, you have a field of formalism and a field that is semi-formalistic. Delgado points out that formalism stops racism. If credible, we should conduct a thought experiment to test it out.

Cerno: I do not see how!

452. Delgado, *The Rodrigo Chronicles*. This work is an in-depth non-technical example of Narrative Jurisprudence and Critical Race Theory Introduces the younger sibling of Derrick Bell's Geneva Crenshaw to the scene. *The Coming Race War* is the highly anticipated sequel to the *Rodrigo Chronicles* and details Rodrigo's entrance into the profession of Law.

Goines: PhD programs say if one has no Master's, it should take five years to get the degree. In five years, you may have finished classes and started writing your dissertation, but somehow may not get the degree in this time period. The time you spend in school on the doctoral level is relatively dependent on how fast you can get adopted by your committee. The military is non-discriminatory in that in five years, if I am a go-getter, I know how much I will make, what my rank will be, and I obtain tenure. The word "nigga" is not allowed, though we now know that Blacks, for example, are drastically underrepresented in the officer ranks.⁴⁵³ Everyone dresses the same and issues of class disappear more than any other place in society. Although historically the military has had its problems, the military has more minorities in top positions than any other sector of society.⁴⁵⁴ The military also offers a culture shock for many Whites in that it is the first time where they have had to obey a Black Person in a superior position. Many academics would not support what I am about to say. If the academy wants more minorities, it should adopt militaristic formalism. Universities should offer sign-on bonuses as the military does. We should institute an academic equivalent of the soldier's creed. As we talked about earlier, these policy initiatives are vital. For example, women and communities of color would have an even smaller peer group at the graduate level than they likely had as undergraduates. This means by and large that the pressures on them will likely be intensified at higher levels. Now some would think that it might be the opposite—that one has youthful naïveté and then gains a foothold as they become more seasoned students in graduate education. But

453. Smith, Irving "Why Black Officers Still Fail," *Strategic Studies Institute*, April 17 2014, <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/2010autumn/Smith.pdf>.

454. Mooskos, Charles "Success Story: Blacks in the Military Occupy More Management Positions than in Any Other Sector of American Society," *The Atlantic* May 1, 1986.

what generally happens is that one's intellect is actually assailed more in graduate education than in undergraduate studies.⁴⁵⁵

Cerno: The role of the military is to protect our country from foreign enemies. It needs formalism to be effective.

Goines: I say this in all seriousness: The role of the universities is the most important in all society. In fact, the universities can be seen as a battleground of intellectual warfare.

Cerno: Move on what other ways do you see the formalistic informal familiarity manifest itself.

Goines: Inside the academy or in the non-militaristic work world, cultural merit manifests in the role model paradigm. This is the informal mode of social reproduction that manifests itself in various ways. I call one of its most troubling constructs, "The Son I Never Had Syndrome." Notice I said "the son I never had" on purpose.

Cerno: The Son I Never Had Syndrome?

Goines: The young burgeoning White scholar usually has a professor who will see something in him, maybe it is his class discussion or perhaps the unorthodox way he writes. All of this will strike a chord and the faculty member will be compelled to help him. Cultural familiarity is important in that this professor may see himself in the young White scholar. Now, in some cases, perhaps a Black Scholar or a woman can get a bit of guidance from a majority group professor. I would contend that a few of these folks might get adopted provided they have the right bearing. You may not get fully adopted; maybe you can become a foster child of sorts.

Cerno: So you are implying that having a so-called unorthodox style is not the problem; the problem is being Black and unorthodox. The Black student who is just as bright or maybe

455. "Who's Ready for the Gang Bang? What Is it Like to Be a Woman in Philosophy?" *Being a Woman in Philosophy*, accessed August 3, 2013, <http://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/2011/10/25/whos-ready-for-the-gang-bang/>.

even brighter does not usually have the benefit of a minority mentor. What if, for example, a college department does have a Black faculty member? Will it solve the problem? You do realize that, in some cases White faculty members might be far more liberal than their counterparts who are Black.

Goines: Well, I think you are right in part. I have a tendency to pride myself on worshipping to the level of one's epistemology, not at the level of one's epidermis. I agree with this in part. If I have learned anything from my reading of Fanon, it is this: I am inclined to believe that being Left is a huge issue in the modern academy. The Black faculty member is usually under tremendous stress. There are several reasons why. The academic unit they are housed in will invariably steer all the people of color to them in an effort to serve as exemplars of adult responsibility. They usually sit on five or six committees. They are constrained in that they want to get tenure, so much of their time is spent writing for orthodox journals that no one but their old White male colleagues will read. The Black faculty member often shows the mentor role. And finally, the Black faculty member in a majority White department is often so concerned about the perception of his or her White colleagues that they would not make a good mentor for someone like me. The other problem of the minority faculty is this; if they have a desire to mentor, they may limit themselves. Say that you have a department where there are three minority faculty members, one who is Black; one who is Latina, say in this case Mexican; and one Asian, who happens to be from Japanese descent. The Black students predictably gravitate to the Black faculty member. Likewise, the Mexican and other Latino students gravitate to Professor Gomez, whose name is really Hernandez, but for some reason she is called Gomez.

Cerno: And of course the Asian students go to the Asian faculty member. What is wrong with that?

Goines: The system works well as a formal informal system until you put the troublemaker in, and, for the sheer fun of it, we will call him...?

Cerno: Goines D. Donald.

Goines: Exactly. Say Goines' ideology fits better with the Latina faculty and Goines asks to work with her. What do you think happens?

Cerno: The faculty sees this shared interest and decides to work with the brilliant young Black Scholar to help mold him to become all that he can be.

Goines: And that is where you are wrong, my friend. The formal informal system does not work that way. The Black student will either be mentored by the Black faculty member or not mentored at all. In a way, this is a social-cultural breeding.

Cerno: Very interesting; it is almost like the formal informal system is for minorities a form of False-Consciousness.

Goines: That it is, my friend; that it is.

Cerno: I have noticed something that I think may add to your point. I notice in my department at work or when I meet you at school, the Blacks, in particular Blacks from the South, always answer in with "yes ma'am" or "no sir." I also have noticed that the Blacks come in, do their work, and go home. Even when I invite them for drinks, most Blacks will not go out with us Whites in town. They seem somewhat anti-social. You seem to be saying that this may not be the case. My perceptions are based on the dominant Brown-nosing model.

Goines: You have got a good idea of what I am saying; the Black coworker goes home after work, not in an attempt to be antisocial, but rather as an attempt to keep up formal boundaries. What may seem cold and impersonal to you may in fact be the attempt for the Blacks to add a formalistic element. Whites do not want to just keep things cordial; this is the reason I

personally think my friends loath their departmental cookouts. I am comparing this feeling to a ten-year-old seeing their grade school teacher outside of the classroom and the uneasiness it causes. In Delgado's work he says merit can be equated to a form of etiquette. Now the hidden curriculum is that if you really want to get that raise and promotion and you want to get access to the less overt opportunities when the boss has a party, you should go. But these insights do not appear out of nowhere, one has to find them. We ought not to use a deficit model of thinking, but let us extend our analysis: Not only do communities of color network differently than White brothers and sisters, their social networks are generally far smaller than are their White colleagues.⁴⁵⁶ Policy might be enacted to allow mentors access to large networks and by instituting classes on etiquette and the hidden curriculum.

Cerno: I admit this position struck a note for me, in that as a product of a poor White family I was not exposed to the properness of a more affluent upbringing. I felt awkward eating with this spoon or that spoon, so much so that I took a class. Today it still feels foreign eating this with this fork, etc. The knowledge of the proper wine to be served with veal is all very important to the success in the professional world.

Goines: Think about this: Since you were not exposed to this culture of formality in dining, do you think you stood out against those who grew up with this experience?

Cerno: Of course. I was often thought of as very "country."

Goines: Merit as etiquette is powerful in that not only is the Black Person supposed to be absent the merit criteria, but also the one who possesses the merit is even more criticized than say his uncultured counterpart. The Black Person who speaks well and has command of the language will face problems that a Black Person in poverty will never face. The merit paradigm

⁴⁵⁶. Roithmayr, Daria *Reproducing Racism: How Everyday Choices Lock In White Advantage*. (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

of familiarity comes to the fore in the old boy networks of our society. The old boy network is the oldest materialization of social reproduction.

Cerno: I see what you are saying, Goines. In thinking about cultural merit being formalized informal familiarity, I thought about Letters of Recommendation vs. Letters of Sonhood.

Goines: Why so?

Cerno: You say that cultural merit is formalized informal familiarity. I think the distinction between the letter types provides tremendous explanatory value. Think about it, Goines: The letter of recommendation is the ultimate sign of familiarity. The mere fact that one has asked someone to write a stranger to tell this new person about you assumes that this letter will not just be favorable, but highly favorable. A favorable letter of recommendation is not saying much. The “son I have never had” recommendation that is written meticulously says the most about someone. We both know it is not enough to just call someone smart; everyone who applies to elite places is smart. If you say that the minority are not privy to mentors, this relationship cannot be had; this places minorities at a significant disadvantage. Also notice letters of recommendation must come from specific people, such as professors. I imagine a lot of letters of recommendation that Black students get say they are friendly or bring diversity to a program.

But rarely, both covertly and overtly point to the intellectual capability of the minority. Think about a letter of recommendation you got as opposed to one of mine. Goines, your best letter of recommendation said something like, “Goines is like an unexpected breeze on a humid day; a pleasant surprise leaving you refreshed.” My letters of recommendation said that I contain a rare intellectual gift that must be nurtured and cultivated. Another letter I received alluded to the inability of the letter grading system to characterize the advanced level of my work. Goines,

why do letters have the line in which you have the right to view the letter? This is a mechanism I would assume to maintain relations of power if a Professor who gave us the same grade said, “Goines is a treat to have around but Cerno has a mind like Einstein.”

Goines: Exactly—dead for years!!!

Upon the final smug comment from Goines, he and Cerno decided to grab dessert and a cup of coffee at another café across town. The two friends drove for approximately 30 minutes, constantly laughing at the voices of announcers on N.P.R. They entered a café that resembles something from the Left Bank. The musty smell of cigar smoke and pipe tobacco waft in the air. This scene begins with two white chocolate mochas in hand. Relaxed on a comfy sofa, Goines begins the conversation.

The Necessity yet Insufficiency of Strategically Constructed Diversity

Programs, in which Cerno and Goines Discuss Passing Constitutional

Muster and the Unintended Disempowering of the Already Disenfranchised

Goines: (lighting another of his cigars) Cerno, I know you watch science fiction. You love Star Wars, Star Trek, and Knight Rider.

Cerno: I do, you know I do!

Goines: Why?

Cerno: Sci-Fi pushes the limits of possibility. It causes me to broaden my horizons; I think that we are but a small part of something larger.

Goines: Which is the best Sci-Fi saga of all time? I have to go with George Lucas and the Star Wars chronicles; it is the standard by which Sci-Fi is measured.

Cerno: Come on man! You cannot be serious! William Shatner is a god!

Goines: I was thinking about something today that is should be close to your heart. The end of every show has the crew in peril; inevitably a supporting character will come up with an

outlandish idea that appears to be the crew's last prospect for survival. What is the dialogue like that comes after this scenario?

Cerno: They say the following: "That idea is so crazy, it might just work." Then the commander replies back, "It's got to work, it's our only chance."

Goines: In many ways, I feel that we are in a similar predicament in the country now. All signs point to a window that is about to close; once closed, I fear that it may never again be opened.

Cerno: (lighting his cigar) you are talking about the Michigan cases,⁴⁵⁷ are you not?

Goines: Very truly. I started to think about what measures could be taken to assure that our country would not halt the minuscule amounts of progress that we have made.

Cerno: I think that Affirmative Action has worked well. In fact, maybe too well! We have more Blacks in positions of power now than we have ever had.

Goines: For White women and in some cases, White Men! Take Edward Taylor's work for example. Taylor shows that a state like Washington had an Affirmative Action program that was constructed in a manner that more White Men were hired than any minority group.⁴⁵⁸ If one couples White women, who I question sometimes as minorities, the total of Whites hired for state work was 213% more than Blacks and 221% more than Asians. Taylor shows that a program that was designed to allow for admission of students whose grades and test scores fall short of formal criteria would have issues such as race, income, educational attainment of family members, and college preparation considered as factors of admission. Eighty percent of the

457. *Gratz vs. Bollinger* and *Grutter vs. Bollinger* (Michigan Cases), speculation points to the so-called diversity policy of the University of Michigan will be struck down.

458. Taylor, Edward "Critical Race Theory and Interest Convergence in the Backlash Against Affirmative Action: Washington State Initiative," *Teachers College Record* 102, no. 3 (June 2000).

freshmen of Washington who were admitted under this program were White. The sizes of such programs such as Washington cause me to question their motives as well. Washington Admissions Alternative Program admits only 978 students out of 70,883 undergraduates. Washington State's two-year colleges have 14.7% of staff comprised of people of color, and 9.2% of four-year institutions' administrations or staffs are people of color. Whites comprise 90.8% of staff and faculty at four-year institutions and 88.0% of faculty at community colleges.⁴⁵⁹

Cerno: What then do you propose as an alternative to the current system? How else are we to become more diverse? After all, is it not the Left who speak to the importance of diversity?

Goines: Increasing diversity is essential to whom? The problem is that we on the Left are not only constrained by the now conservative courts. The ability for us to tailor a program that is constitutional, something that CRT scholars have avoided, is largely because the courts, as Spann says, are the veiled majoritarian⁴⁶⁰. I also am very critical of the now popular stance of diversity.

Cerno: I assume you will elaborate as to why.

Goines: Let us start this way. Who are now the most influential forces in our society that have pushed society to become more diverse?

Cerno: The universities and big businesses. Of course, this came about because the government used its coercive powers to make this so.

Goines: It is ironic that the two institutions that have had perhaps the most unfavorable history of discrimination are now leading the pack for diversity and inclusiveness. The diversity argument is being championed today, Cerno, by none other than society's elite. Take, for

459. Ramirez, Steve "A General Theory of Cultural Diversity," *Michigan Journal of Race and Law* 7, no.1 (2001).

460 Spann, Girardeau. "Pure Politics." *Michigan Law Review* Vol. 88, (): pp. 1971-2033.

example, arguably the two most influential books in this genre of thought. *Not All Black and White* by Christopher Edeley Jr. and *The Shape of the River* by William G. Bowen and Derek Bok

Cerno: I see what you are going to say. Christopher Edeley Jr. is Harvard Law School graduate who teaches at Harvard Law School. William G. Bowen is the president of the Mellon Foundation. He was at one time the president of Princeton University. Derek Bok is a professor at the Kennedy School of Government and Public Policy. Bok was dean of the law school and president of Harvard University. Even the colleges in the Bowen and Bok study are interesting to note: They are liberal arts schools such as Oberlin College, Smith College, Swarthmore College, and Wellesley College. The research universities include the likes of Columbia, Duke, Emory, Northwestern, Penn, Princeton, Stanford, Michigan, North Carolina, Vanderbilt, and Yale—very rarefied air indeed.

So you believe that there is more here than meets the eye. I am going to get a chance to hear a good old-fashioned conspiracy theory from you, am I not?

Goines: No not a conspiracy theory, per se. I am naturally skeptical and curious as to why elites are now concerned about the benighted masses; masses of people which they have historically exploited and still exploit.

Cerno: Maybe diversity means more diverse amongst the elites of our society.

Goines: Maybe. I do know that Derrick Bell's concept of Interest-Convergence says that Whites will not advance anything beneficial to minorities unless there is a significant Whites interest to do so.

I do also know that the results of a recent survey of White graduates from elite universities say that 80% favor retaining or even increasing their schools emphasis on diversity

Seventy percent of White law school students say that diversity in their legal education has greatly benefited their educational experience.

In the Michigan case, General Motors has written a brief citing and supporting the benefits of Affirmative Action. Steve Ramirez said, “It is fair to say evidence supports the benefits of diversity in education in preparing students to excel in a multicultural world and more diverse America. The educational mission of institutions of higher learning cannot be divorced from the needs of corporate America and because corporate America needs a more diverse work force, American universities should produce a more diverse group of graduates.”

Cerno, Proctor & Gamble put it well by asserting, “When we started to get more diverse, we got richer.”

Cerno: So the new age mantra should be “Get diversity because it helps you get paid!”

Goines: Exactly; now it is upon this backdrop that we can truly analyze an alternative plan of Affirmative Action. Amongst academics and, to a certain extent, the larger society, Affirmative Action has become issue of importance.

Goines: Much controversy has as always surrounded and will continue to surround Affirmative Action plans. Cerno, many have argued about the struggles that left teach intellectuals to tailor a plan that will pass constitutional muster.

Cerno: Not many of the Left’s movers and shakers have put forth compelling plans that would suffice the most stringent of constitutional challenges. The ones that I do see that your side put forward look very similar to things I myself would support.

Goines: Unfortunately, that is the way we have to go in order to gain some modicum of success. Even the best forms of Affirmative Action alternatives leave those of us on the Left who are truly about business of change extremely disheartened.

Goines pauses to sip some of his now cold chocolate concoction. He then pulls out a surprise for his conservative buddy: two Montecristo's.

Goines: Cerno, it is important to understand that race-specific Affirmative Action was instituted as a quick fix. Daria Roithmayr wrote that race precise Affirmative Action was "Meant to be efficient, inexpensive, and a pragmatic way to remedy discrimination."

Cerno, Affirmative Action was a weak program to begin with and now the alternatives to it are even weaker. Affirmative Action in its infancy was a tool of White privilege. Notice that Roithmayr said key words such as efficient, pragmatic, and inexpensive; not to be idealistic, but justice has never been pragmatic, inexpensive, or efficient.

Roithmayr's plan is the best alternative program because it fills the gaping hole that is left when strict scrutiny is the means of judicial analysis. Roithmayr states, "Class rank programs and social economic programs are attractive rhetorically, but not effective at addressing the issues of racial disparity."⁴⁶¹ The Roithmayr plan is necessary in that it best navigates the sticky and treacherous web that we call constitutionality. It is timely and pragmatic, and the most attractive part of the program is that it closely hugs the line of White privilege. It Definitely Appeals to the interest of White institutions.

Cerno: What you said seems to me to be complementary; do you have any qualms with her program? I know you must if you said that it is the best choice of weak alternatives. I know you do not believe race-neutral Affirmative Action can work well.

Goines: Roithmayr is amongst many on the Left who label themselves to be Radical Pragmatists.

⁴⁶¹ Roithmayr, Daria, Direct Measures: An Alternative Form of Affirmative Action. Michigan Journal of Race and the Law, Fall 2001.

This group of intellectuals has no concrete dogma that causes them to lapse into ineffective.

They are in very real sense battlefield strategists. I respect that it is tough operating in a “damned if you do damned if you don’t” system.

Cerno: Goines, you are then saying that the battle cry of people such as Roithmayr is “by any means necessary.” Malcolm would be so proud. (Said sarcastically)

Goines: That being said, one of my issues of contention is that I have not now nor ever will be for minorities having to justify that they have been discriminated but to cause. As a person who is a Critical Race Theorist, one thing I know is that race is so complex that often times one may have only an inkling as to how they have actually been victimized. Justice Marshall’s dissent in Bakke is as legitimate today as it was then: No Black, regardless of position, is free from discrimination’s effects.

Any attempt for a university to tell a Black Person what is or is not legitimate discrimination is a price already benighted people should not have to pay. The other issue of concern I have with Roithmayr’s plan is her third criterion, which proposes a preference if an applicant has the intention of working with or providing legal service to the underserved.

Cerno: Why would you object to this? I have heard you say things that closely resemble this. Would not this increase help to the people who you and others on the Left say need it the most?

Goines: In theory, I agree. I thought about this the other day. Cerno, say you have two potential applicants to a law school. One is a White person who wants to, upon matriculation, create a not-for-profit organization that provides legal services to the poor. This on its face is noble and under Roithmayr’s plan, this person would receive preference. Contrast this with our second person who is Black, but wants to become a lawyer as a means to get paid. I think the

Black Person will still benefit underserved people much more than a White person. The Black lawyer will in all likelihood still reside in a predominantly segregated neighborhood. They will go to a Black Church and frequent the Black barbershops. By being Black, they will have a much more intimate contact with the underclass. Unfortunately, as it is the mere fact that one-fourth of the Black males are currently involved with the correctional system makes it likely that very few Black families are not confronted with the legal system. One of the chief ways that I think about a lawyer is as a counselor of law. When our Black lawyer's family and or neighbors call to him for advice about a legal problem, they have tapped into a service that many underprivileged cannot. The mere ability to recommend a lawyer to someone is a form of service. The mere existence of the Black lawyer, no matter how much he or she is disengaged from the community, can provide the motivation to aspire underrepresented youth to something greater.

Looking at his Cartier watch, Cerno notices the late hour and reluctantly tells his friend that he must end their conversation at this point. They move towards the exit and smoke the remainders of their cigars. Upon waving bye, Goines pulls out of Cerno's parking lot; he then begins the long ride home, thinking to himself that despite all his conjecture and protests, he has to get some sleep because, after all, he takes the standardized test tomorrow morning.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Can Philosophy Disband its Wheatley Court, Integrating the Problems which Lead to the Questions?

If it pleases the reader, I would like to take this opportunity to address some questions that may still remain. Before that, let me state here that it has been my attempt here in this text to make use of an eclectic methodology much like Anna Julie Cooper in her text, *A Voice From the South*⁴⁶² or W.E.B. Dubois in his magisterial, *Souls of Black Folks*⁴⁶³ or as James Baldwin did in *The Price of the Ticket*,⁴⁶⁴ I have attempted to utilize personal narrative, allegory, and numerous other methods to answer the questions posed in this text. In some respects, Black philosophers might find it of some utility to think of the obstacles faced by those in the early Black literature movement,⁴⁶⁵ which might provide fertile soil for philosophers to till.

A very useful trope is provided by Nellie McKay in her seminal text, *Naming the Problem that Leads to the Question: Who Shall Teach African American Literature*.⁴⁶⁶ Professor McKay cites epigraphs of the judges of the Wheatley Court who deemed Phyllis Wheatley the rightful author of a number of poems. The esteemed panel of the Boston literary elite leveled the following point of criticism on Wheatley. The judges deemed her work to be both “merely imitative” and “without invention.”⁴⁶⁷ This criticism was leveled against Wheatley in particular,

462. Cooper, Anna Julia and Mary Washington, *A Voice from the South (Schomburg Library of 19th Century Black Women Writers)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

463. Dubois, *Souls*.

464. Baldwin, James “Every Good Bye Ain’t Gone,” in *The Price of the Ticket* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1985).

465. Gates, Henry L. ed., *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, (New York: Norton Press, 2003).

466. McKay, Nellie “Naming the Problem that Leads to the Question: Who Shall Teach African American Literature,” in *White Scholars/African American Texts*, ed. Lisa Long (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

but it was also meant to be demonstrative of the caliber of all Blacks' intellectual production more generally.

In many respects it might be argued that by and large, the modern day academy lauds individuals who operate in Philosophy's current version of the Wheatley Court. These individuals still hold to this linguistic schema. Ironically what was once used as the basis of dismissal has now morphed to become the very standards by which Black Scholarship is judged. Tommy Curry and I share the view that other disciplines such as Black sociology,⁴⁶⁸ Black historians,⁴⁶⁹ Black psychologists,⁴⁷⁰ and Black literary scholars⁴⁷¹ have all significantly set out and to some extent in answering questions about the necessity of having a Black voice in their respective disciplines.⁴⁷²

I argued earlier that many Black philosophers currently hold to a form of epistemic convergence, which argues for the legitimacy of Black philosophers if and only if they are likened to White thinkers. For example, I sit on the editorial review board of a prestigious Philosophy and education journal. Once, I had the pleasure of reviewing an article that was

467 Consider the following asserted by Immanuel Kant which expresses a similar notion: "The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises about the trifling. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of Black who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have even been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality, even though among the Whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color." See Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1960). See also Henry Gates, *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley: America's First Black Poet and Her Encounters with the Founding Fathers* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003).

468. Watson, Wilbur "The Idea of Black Sociology: its Cultural and Political Significance," *The American Sociologist*, 11 (1976): 115-123.

469 Woodson, Carter *The African Background Outlined: or, Handbook for the Study of the Negro* (Chicago: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1936).

470. Jones, Reginald *Black Psychology* (Oakland: Cobb & Henry, 1991).

471. Gates, Henry *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1987).

472. Curry, Tommy "It's Still Black in the Details: A Reflection on Robert Bart's Interrogation of 'On Derelict and Method,'" *Radical Philosophy Review* 14 (2011).

written with the thesis that the philosophical contributions of Carter G. Woodson, particularly his educational philosophies, are understudied.

I agree wholeheartedly with this position. But I argued that part of the reason Woodson should be studied is the extent to which his philosophical view mirrors Dewey's. To my knowledge, this text has yet to be published (though it undoubtedly will be). Though I disagreed with the primary thesis of the article, I thought it furthered the conversation on Carter G. Woodson. It is with this thought in mind that I ask the reader to consider the following questions.

First, what is the original contribution of this dissertation to the field of African American Studies, Philosophy, Critical Race Theory, and Counter Narrative Storytelling? Secondly, what is this work's contribution to the Philosophy of Education? Thirdly does this text provide a unique insight to these corpuses of scholarship or does this text in anyway further current scholarship by adding complexity to or augmenting research on Black Philosophy and Black philosophers of education?

In chapter two of this text, it is my view that I have made original additions to the theoretical grammar of both Critical Race Theory and Whiteness Studies with my concept of "White Autism" and "Critical Race Moments." Whiteness has before been described as an "Invisible Knapsack" of privileges,⁴⁷³ or, as Cherry L. Harris has argued, Whiteness is a form of property⁴⁷⁴ and currently there are websites that are dedicated to so-called "Stuff White People Like."⁴⁷⁵

I would like to assert that a more useful trope perhaps is to see Whiteness with respect to race as a form of autism. The utility of this is that it provides us with a different way of

473. Greenwood, Ronni Michelle and Aidan Christian, "What Happens When We Unpack the Invisible Knapsack? Intersectional Political Consciousness and Inter-group Appraisals," *Sex Roles* 59, no.5-6 (2008): 404-417.

474. Harris, "Whiteness as Property."

475. Stuff White People Like | this blog is devoted to stuff that...." <http://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/> (accessed April 17, 2014).

understanding Whiteness. Whiteness as autism is said to be an impaired ability for social interaction; verbal and non-verbal communication; and restrictive, repetitive or stereotypical behavior. Since autism is properly understood as a spectrum disorder with a broad range from mild to severe, Whiteness operates in similar manner.

Some advantages to the trope of White autism, though it might be argued and I would almost admit that I am being rather reductionist for the point of explication I would contend provides a compatible tool to a cyborg theory of race. Another primary contribution is that, unlike the work of Peggy McIntosh or Cheryl Harris, the concept of White autism tries to bring us to an understanding of what Whiteness is as opposed to what contributions unearth, which is what Whiteness does. Whereas their concepts provide tremendous explanatory value about the privileges of Whiteness, they don't substantively explain why White brothers and sisters perceive the world in the way they do. This concept is also malleable as autism is a spectrum disorder with varying degrees of severity.

I would like to contend here that there are varying degrees in a similar manner. In my view, this conception of Whiteness as autism is much less derogatory than, say, Bobby Wright's notion that Whiteness is a form of psychopathic behavior.⁴⁷⁶ I also believe it is compatible with the notion I have about Martians, which is much like Thomas Nagel's assertion that the subjective positionality of the other can never really be known by me, save I become that other. Whiteness autism provides us another conceptual tool for the notion of Whiteness that is contrary to the largely held idea that one can be educated out of Whiteness. As we know, much of the way that Whites encounter the world is through a so-called epistemological ignorance.⁴⁷⁷

476. Wright, Bobby *The Psychopathic Racial Personality and Other Essays* (Chicago: Third World Press), 1984.

477. Sullivan, Shannon *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

The trope is also useful as I think it certainly is compatible with the first tenet of CRT, that White supremacy and racism is non-aberrational. As of this correspondence, we understand far less about autism than we know. Perhaps Whiteness could be thought of in a similar vein. In an effort to anticipate likely criticisms of the use of this trope, I would offer the following: First, it might be argued that using the term autism, because it is a genetic condition, might be seen as biologically deterministic and or eugenic in nature. To this criticism, I would assert that it is widely known in the modern academy that race is a social construct and that any conception that might be said to be biologically determined has largely been discredited. Secondly, it might be argued that a conception like White autism might be seen as totally contrary to the very nature of the academy in general and colleges of education, in particular, the previous belief that education cures all forms of ignorance. It has been pointed out to me that some readers might see the autism trope as an argument that White folks are, in a racial sense, irredeemable. This is not my argument, but even if it were, some would argue that it would be disingenuous of me.

Dr. Yancy and others have opined that any Black Person who wants to make his living in the academy on some level believes in the power of education and some form of racial transcendence. For example, it could be argued by the reader that even I hold this view; if not why have two White Men on one's PhD committee in light of the fact that in a department such as Education Policy, Organization and Leadership, one could have an all-Black committee if one desired.

To this criticism, I would agree that even I hold to the hope of transcendence in a qualitatively different society than the one in which we currently occupy. Finally, I imagine that some criticism may proceed from the point of disciplinary expertise. By this I mean that some critics might point to the fact that I am a philosopher and not a biologist or a psychologist. To

this point, as I have said earlier, race is not a biological concept and thus being a biologist would not be of the greatest necessity. Additionally, as I am not a psychologist, my point here is that White autism is a mental phenomenon, but not one that I might fully understand. The final criticism of my concept of White autism is one of tone. Is my tone rooted in a false dichotomy? Namely that I am too close to the subject for a scholarly investigation, and as such I am not subjecting my focus to a scholarly rigor rather than mere racial rhetoric. To this criticism I would like to point out that I am a strict adherent to the racial realist school of CRT.

I have created the concept of the critical race moment. Chapter three of this text might be thought of as a chapter on educational practice through the historical narratives of Black luminary thinkers. In chapter four of this text, I discussed what might be said to be educational philosophies in practice. In chapter five, I wanted to delve into the institutional barriers to broadening the discipline of Philosophy. One of the phenomena I want to point out here is the way in which dominant conceptions of merit are largely constructed in ways that harm minorities. Also, perhaps an understated point in this chapter is the extent to which I believe that educational institutions, particularly the Ivy League and the so-called “Public Ivies,” might apply their considerable influence to remake the world of education. Also, implicit in chapter five is the idea that making the discipline of Philosophy or law broader would in some cases be grim verification of the interest convergence thesis. This is because if a discipline like Philosophy would be seen as being a place where the contributions of women and minorities can be heard and make a viable contribution, this inclusion would likely save what many seem to think is a dying discipline.

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Appendix A

Exit Poll⁴⁷⁸

Gender

Category	Obama	Romney	% Total
Male	45	52	47
Female	55	44	53

In which age group are you?

Category	Obama	Romney	% Total
18-29	60	37	19
30-44	52	45	27
45-64	47	51	38
65 or over	44	56	16

In which age group are you?

Category	Obama	Romney	% Total
18-24	60	36	11
25-29	60	38	8
30-39	55	42	17
40-49	48	50	20
50-64	47	52	28
65 or over	44	56	16

Race

Category	Obama	Romney	% Total
White	39	59	72
Black	93	6	13
Hispanic or Latino	71	27	10
Asian	73	26	3
Other	58	38	2

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<http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls.main/>.